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In search of life divine

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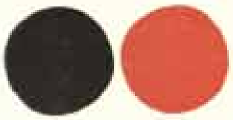
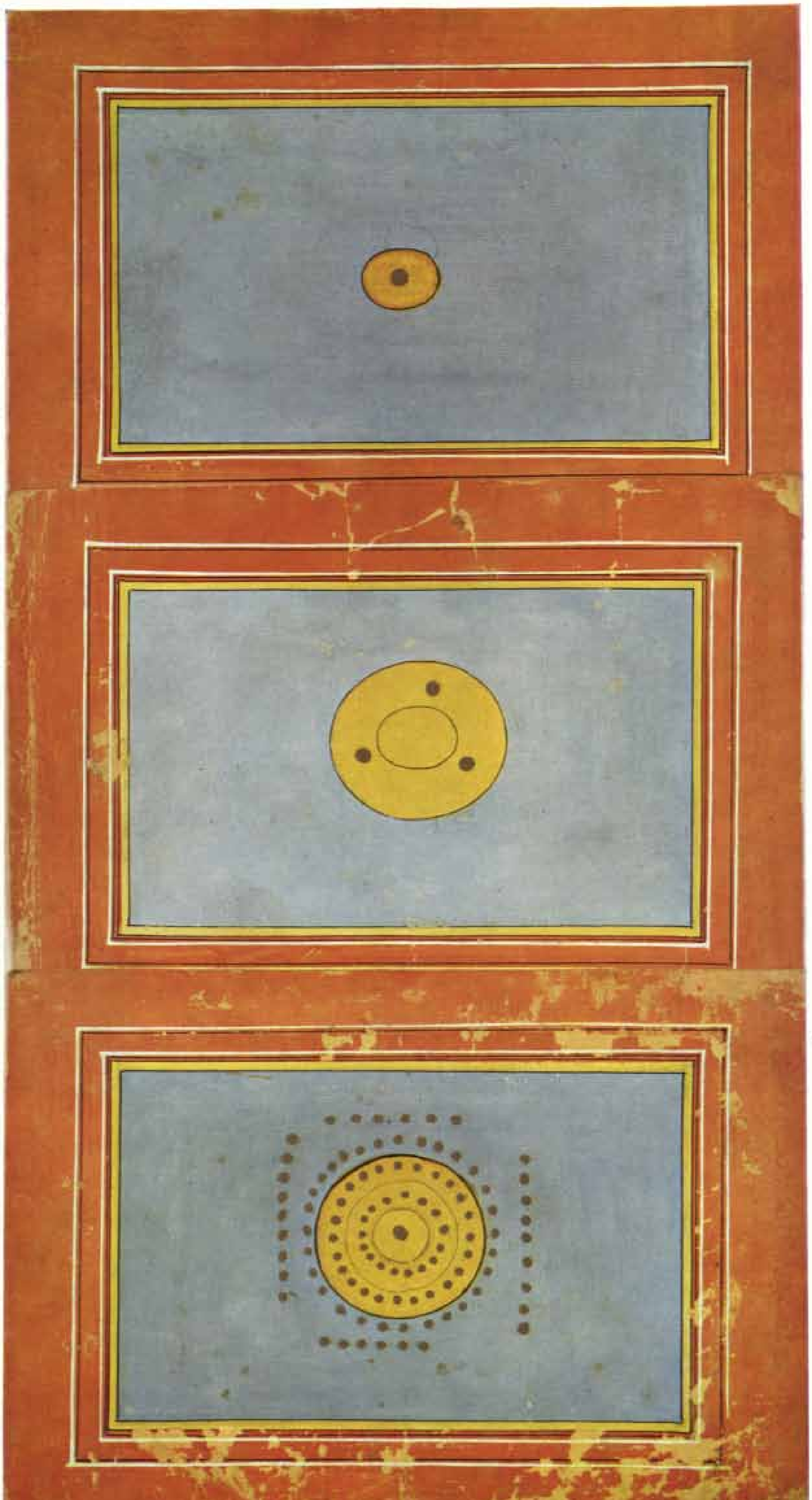
From Brahma to a blade of grass everything in the world is the creation of Maya-Sakti





Ajit Mookerjee

TANTRA ART

its Philosophy & Physics

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The author extends his sincere gratitude to those who must remain unnamed and initiated him into Tantra art, the exploration of which has been for him, for over a decade, an engrossing spiritual adventure.

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And a final indispensable expression of gratitude to Sudha, who first instilled, and then furthered a passion for a path so ancient and so new, and with her the author remembers something more, for which the right word can never be found.

To Her

That Power who is defined as Consciousness in all beings, reverence to Her, reverence to Her, reverence to Her, reverence, reverence.

That Power who is known as Reason in all beings, reverence to Her, reverence to Her, reverence to Her, reverence, reverence.

That Power who exists in all beings in the form of Sleep, reverence to Her, reverence to Her, reverence to Her, reverence, reverence.

That Power who exists in all beings as Hunger, reverence to Her, reverence to Her, reverence to Her, reverence, reverence.

That Power who exists in all beings as Shadow, reverence to Her, reverence to Her, reverence to Her, reverence, reverence.

That Power who exists in all beings as Energy, reverence to Her, reverence to Her, reverence to Her, reverence, reverence.

That Power who exists in all beings in the form of Thirst, reverence to Her, reverence to Her, reverence to Her, reverence, reverence.

That Power who exists in all beings as Forgiveness, reverence to Her, reverence to Her, reverence to Her, reverence, reverence.

That Power who exists in all beings in the form of Species, reverence to Her, reverence to Her, reverence to Her, reverence, reverence.

That Power who exists in all beings as Bashfulness, reverence to Her, reverence to Her, reverence to Her, reverence, reverence.

That Power who exists in all beings as Peace, reverence to Her, reverence to Her, reverence to Her, reverence, reverence.

That Power who exists in all beings in the form of Faith, reverence to Her, reverence to Her, reverence to Her, reverence, reverence.

That Power who exists in all beings as Loveliness, reverence to Her, reverence to Her, reverence to Her, reverence, reverence.

That Power who exists in all beings as Fortune, reverence to Her, reverence to Her, reverence to Her, reverence, reverence.

That Power who exists in all beings as Vocation, reverence to Her, reverence to Her, reverence to Her, reverence, reverence.

That Power who exists in all beings in the form of Memory, reverence to Her, reverence to Her, reverence to Her, reverence, reverence.

That Power who exists in all beings as Compassion, reverence to Her, reverence to Her, reverence to Her, reverence, reverence.

That Power who exists in all beings as Fulfilment, reverence to Her, reverence to Her, reverence to Her, reverence, reverence.

That Power who exists in all beings as Mother, reverence to Her, reverence to Her, reverence to Her, reverence, reverence.

That Power who exists in all beings in the form of Illusion, reverence to Her, reverence to Her, reverence to Her, reverence, reverence.

Chandi, Chap. V · SLKS. 16–80

Plate 5
Devi as Chandi (detail). Clay. Kumartuli, Calcutta. Contemporary expression of ageless traditional form. Private collection.

Plate 6

Hevajra and his sakti. Stone. Bengal. Pala style. c. 11th century A.D. The union of the male and female principles is a symbol of eternal communion and an awareness of Oneness through duality. From the Tantric point of view, the consummation is the human being, man and woman comprised as one unit. Indian Museum, Calcutta.

I

Sā'ham 'I am She' or So'ham 'I am He', for 'there is no difference between Me and Thee'. Tantra has developed a system of thought and practice which can make us see the universe as if it were within ourselves, and ourselves as if we were within the universe. The form that our imagination creates then expresses our formless essence.

Tantra is both an experience of life and a scientific method by which man can bring out his inherent spiritual power. In this way the Tantric rituals are the basis of many a philosophy—Saiva, Sakta, Jaina, Buddhist or Vaishnava; Jains, for example, developed to a very high degree an atomic theory, space-time relationship, astronomical observations and a mathematical concept of the universe. In fact, the Tantric method of *sadhana* has been in vogue even from Vedic times. Tantric doctrines and rituals also crossed the Indian frontiers.

Tantra is derived from the Sanskrit root, *tan*, meaning to expand. Tantra thus indicates all comprehensive knowledge or expansion of knowledge. Human experience owes to Tantra the discovery and location of the centres of energy—*chakras*—in the human body. Every individual, according to Tantra, is a manifestation of that energy, and the objects around us are the outcome of the same consciousness ever revealing itself in various modes.

Man can no longer be the measure of all things. He is integrally bound with the life of all created things and in everything he seeks the underlying essence, the life-pervading truth of the universe. The world as seen in this state of awareness has been known to Tantra-*shastras* as the 'subtle world'.

By such inward contemplation, man acquires the power to remake his vision both of himself and of the world. In fact, no relative vision, however glorious, needs hold him prisoner, if he courageously refuses to form an attachment to it and moves beyond it to the Absolute.

What does this realization mean? That is beyond our grasp until a way is found to actualize it, a way, in other words, which enables us to grasp it. This is the way of Tantra yoga. Yoga is necessary for the highest mental concentration. Only by yoga can one develop all that is dormant in the unconscious.

Yoga is a proving in actual living of the pattern of reality seen spiritually. We learn it by living in it. This crucial experience is one of the great moments of our spiritual history.

On what we used to explain away as mysteries, modern discoveries in higher physics have shed new light. For this the Tantric art of India deserves scientific analysis. What is more, while in abstract art we still normally think in terms of space and time, Tantra has gone further and brought in concepts of sound and light, especially in conditioning art forms. This has no parallel elsewhere.

In this spiritual process, a new sign language symbolizing the man-universe relation was discovered and used. Thus the method of yoga assumed a great importance in art; Tantric art itself can be considered one of the essential forms of yoga. To penetrate the enigmatic silence, the mystery of the universe, the *shilpi-yogin* has employed the yogic process (though he sometimes gets through to the core by his mental faculties—*manas*). Tantric symbols and patterns, the store house of which is yet little known, light up form and colour because what the *shilpi-yogin* arrives at is related to his inner spiritual growth.

This belief in a cosmic order, the principle of which art tried to grasp and pass on, led the Tantric-yogin to make himself a part of the mystery, live in it as well as with it. He knew that there must be complete identification of his being; otherwise there could be no revelation of the great secret. "By meditation on anything as the self, one becomes that thing." This is the way to awaken the coiled-up energy, *kundalini sakti,* so that man may realize his Real Self, ultimately unfolding the meaning of the whole universe.

Both internal and external practices are imperative, because long ago, these revealed to the Tantric artist a truth which might open up a new understanding of the world forces in which we are living and which modern artists are trying to explain.

Seeing, knowing, discovering, enjoying—these faculties or powers, according to Tantra, must be realized if they are not to be lifeless. To see the truth, as Sri Aurobindo says, "does not depend on a big intellect or a small intellect. It depends on being in contact with the Truth and the mind silent and quiet to receive it."

Truth can only be sensed in intensity. Thus, Tantric artists dedicate themselves to

the task of integrating their visions. In India, these tasks were regarded as a branch of yoga and involved, like every other spiritual activity, a discipline and a ritual by which artists might become identified with their creative sources.

In the world of contemplation, their experiments in art expression become as universal as their profound questions. In this approach, "the cry of 'Not this! Not that' which echoes so frequently through the Upanishads is a confession not of ignorance, but of the breakdown of human language before the memory of that experience." In the face of that realization art was driven to a highly abstract symbolism of vertical and horizontal lines, dots and circles.

Continually pursuing fundamentals, Tantric art has always tried to integrate forms into geometrical and architectural patterns, the archetypes. The Bhagavata Purana says: "He perceives through the geometrical lines the forms he is to sculpture." A modern critic notes the same thing: "Geometry thus provides a plane of refraction, as it were, between the world of essential being and the world of formal manifestation ..." (Alice Boner: The Symbolic Aspect of Form, JISOA Vol. XVII 1949, p. 40.)

Geometrical forms dominate the whole range of Indian symbolism, particularly in Tantric diagrams and formulae. In these the motifs aspire to absolute 'geometrical purity'.

The mathematical zero, discovered in the yogic process, was born out of reduction and it is with this number that duality comes into existence. In the Vedic diagrams and Tantric *yantras* or in the Jain astral signs, geometrical symbols and patterns are registered and are aesthetically vivid, while *mantras* lead the spirit lost in objectivation back to pure essence. "An image or a *yantra*", according to the Divyavadana, "is a piece of psychological apparatus to call up one or the other aspects of divinity."

Tantric texts emphasize the necessity of inner visualization and the hidden meaning of things. The vision which enables the artist so to visualize reality is a supreme form of concentration. Sukracarya insists: "There exists no form of concentration more absolute than that by which images are created. Direct seeing of a tangible object never allows of such an intensity." Coomaraswamy notes: "The practice of visualization, referred to by Sukracarya, is identical in worship and in art. The worshipper recites the *dhyana mantra*

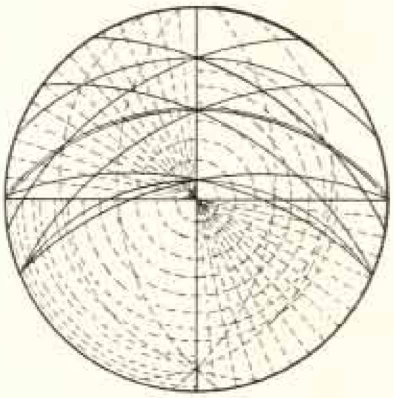
describing the deity, and forms a corresponding mental picture, and it is then to this imagined form that his prayers are addressed and the offerings are made. The artist follows identical prescriptions, but proceeds to represent the mental picture in a visible and objective form, by drawing or modelling. Thus to take an example from Buddhist sources:

"The artist (*sadhaka, mantrin,* or *yogin,* as he is variously and significantly called), after ceremonial purification, is to proceed to a solitary place. There he is to perform the "Sevenfold Office", beginning with the invocation of the hosts of Buddhas and Bodhisattvas, and the offering to them of real or imaginary flowers. Then he must realize in thought the four (infinite) modes of friendliness, compassion, sympathy, and impartiality. Then he must meditate upon the emptiness (*sunyata*) or non-existence of all things, for, 'by the fire of the idea of the abyss, it is said, there are destroyed beyond recovery five factors' or ego-consciousness. Then only should he invoke the desired divinity by the utterance of the appropriate seed-word (*bija*) and should identify himself completely with the divinity to be represented. Then finally, on pronouncing the *dhyana mantra,* in which the attributes are defined, the divinity appears visibly, 'like a reflection' or 'as in a dream', and this brilliant image is the artist's model.

"This ritual is perhaps unduly elaborated, but in essential it shows a clear understanding of the psychology of the imagination. These essentials are the setting aside the transformations of the thinking principle; self-identification with the object of the work; and the vividness of the final image."

"He must meditate" the Tantra says: "on the original Purity of the first principle of Things." The universal adoption of an elementary formal idiom from time immemorial seems to be in conformity with India's abandonment of external reality for inner searching. The underlying perennial character upsets the norm because it throws up realities and symbols that are far removed from the commonplace and the insignificant. The formal idiom is drawn from a life that has retained its ancient simplicity despite the passage of time.

Art is not a profession but a path toward truth and self-realization both for maker and spectator. Tantra has a great message for this awareness.



As Many Faiths, So Many Paths
Ramakrishna

However, the aim of all 'isms' is essentially the same, to realize through all form the formless. Consciously or unconsciously every mode of expression, whether artistic, religious or scientific, is struggling to reach that ultimate reality, the One without a second.

Indian artists, or more precisely, Tantric *shilpi-yogins,* have conceived this realization in terms of dimension—*sabda*—the primordial sound substratum as a form of monosyllabic *mantra,* the *Om* and *Brahmanda* as the vital key-form of a supersensuous world, the Egg. *Om* aims at the total elimination of subject-object by the expression of sound rhythms, while Brahmanda epitomizes the eternal reality in an absolute form. The formless gets a time element, a dimension, a permanent shape, the abstraction of which is aimed at incorporating spatial values conditioned by sound and light.

In Tantric thought, sound without vibration does exist, this unstruck sound, or *anahata-dhvani,* is only heard by the yogi whose senses are withdrawn from the external and turned inwards. The underlying idea for the *anahata-dhvani* comes from the original

pranava sound, which as the aggregate of all existing sounds gives birth to the cosmic process itself. Through its immeasurably powerful range and intensity, the *anahata-dhvani* can create, destroy, and reshape the entire structure of the universe.

The basis for this concept of sound is a central doctrine described in Indian Tantras as *sphotavada*. The *sphota* is the *sabda-brahman* or the *nada-brahman*. It means essentially that every thought or every idea originates in Sound *(nada)*. The moment we think, an unheard sound is formed. As an idea appears in one's mind, the sound that concurrently occurs is the ground for all forms. According to a modern artist: "Form is always temporal, that is relative, for it is nothing more than the means of the moment, whereby today's revelation is made known and given resonance. Sound, then, is the soul of form, which comes to life only through sound, from the inside out." (Kandinski, p. 47.)

The Tantras mention that the cosmos evolves from the fifty *matrika* sounds. Embedded within these sounds are possibilities of new forms; these potential forms materialize when, in the process of evolution, the basic *matrika* sounds undergo permutations. As the Hathayogapradipika says: "Whatever is heard in the form of sound is Shakti. The absorbed state *(laya)* of the *tattvas* (evolutes of Prakriti) is that in which no form exists." (Arthur Avalon [Sir John Woodroffe]: The Serpent Power, p. 100.)

Sound, according to the Tantric view, is classified broadly into four stages: *para, pasyanti, madhyama,* and *vaikhari*. These stages must not be understood as if they are represented in an evolutionary sequence. Rather are they a methodical scheme for displaying the structure of the continuum of manifestation. *Para* sound, the unmanifest stage, is the starting point. This point, by another sound effect called *pasyanti*, elongates the *para* point of sound in different directions *(dik)*. In other words, *pasyanti* (literally 'seeing') sound is the sound emerging towards the visible. After the stage of *pasyanti*, sound begins to crystalize into form. At this stage, sound becomes light or *pasyanti* becomes *madhyama*, the luminous sound. By creating patterns and curves, luminous sound make the enclosure and definition of space possible. In addition, the process of evolving curves projects the original sound in forms accessible to human experience. The final stage of *vaikhari* sound offers infinite opportunities of permutation and combination arising

out of the one harmonious primal sound.

"The three lower stages of manifestation are symbolized as the three sides of a triangle which represents the divine thought, the source of existence. These three stages correspond to the power-of-will *(iccha-sakti)*, the power-of-knowledge *(jnana-sakti)*, and the power-of-action *(kriya-sakti)*, also spoken of as intention, formulation, and expression."

"The centre of the triangle, the undifferentiated action, assimilated to *para-vac*, is the unmanifest Fourth stage. This triangle with its centre becomes a complete symbol of divinity *(isvara)* conceived as the principle-of-speech *(sabdabrahman)* or the word principle *(vac-tattva)*." (Ramachandra Sankara Takki, "Para aur apara Sakti", Kalyana, Sakti anka, p. 477, quoted by Alain Danielou in Hindu Polytheism, pp. 38–39.)

All the objects that we see and feel in this universe from thought or idea to matter, are sounds of particular concentration. Every object consists of a certain density of sound more or less complex and varying from case to case. The sound-before-sound, the *anahata-dhvani* which is not struck because there is no "form against form" and which as *sabda* reverberates upon itself, thereby produces sound-energy that evolves as a *rupa* (or form), enveloped in pulsation. Sound is the reflex of form; and form is the product of Sound.

Every form has its norm of sound as an accompaniment of its energy. Crystals no less than plants derive their shape from their vital energy: yet, as we cannot see the minute changes that alter form, so also we cannot hear the fundamental sound of which it is the visible manifestation. (Sir J. C. Bose's works on plant life.)

According to Tantra, *sabda-tanmatra*, "potential sound" in combination with molecules produces "atom-space". Bhartrihari holds space to be a power or a force *(sakti)* along with time. He affirms that atoms, though themselves without parts, come to have four sides and the lower and upper surfaces by virtue of association with *dik* (space).

As a matter of fact, modern physics has shown that the time dimension can no longer be detached from the space dimension. All measurements of time are really measurements in space and conversely all measurements in space depend on measurements of time.

This theory of sound is the basis for the unique and magnificent *mantra-shastra*, through which, by repetition of *mantras* (thought-forms) and their *japa* (rhythmic

mental concentration on them), one can remodel one's entire physical, mental, and psychic nature.

A mantra is primarily a mental sound and regarded as fundamental in both the creation and dissolution of all form. The function does not end in expressing an ordinary meaning; the very sound aspect of a word or a combination of words has the capacity to activate the divine forms invoked. A *mantra* exerts its power, not so much through expressing the meaning as we understand it, but more deeply through its sound-vibrations.

The power of a *mantra* consists in the effect of its pattern of sound-waves. Under vibration small particles of matter, as one can prove by experiment, group themselves into definite geometrical patterns and figures, corresponding exactly to the quality, strength, and rhythm of the sound. The physical sound patterns produced by *mantras* are capable of coming into sympathetic vibrations with sound patterns which constitute physical phenomena. Seers of ancient times who knew the secrets of the power of sounds composed the *mantras* by joining symbolic syllables in accordance with certain laws laid down in Tantric texts.

A common practice in Tantra ritual is to make *mantras* out of each letter of the Sanskrit alphabet and to associate them with different parts of the body; the purpose or aim is to feel that the different parts of the body are merely the manifestation of the different aspects of the great power. The whole body with all its biological and psychological processes becomes an instrument in and through which the cosmic power reveals itself. According to Tantric principles, the individual being and the universal being are one; all that exists in the universe must also exist in the individual body.

"In this very body", Buddha said, "six feet in length, with its sense impression and its thoughts and ideas, are the world, the origin of the world, the ceasing of the world, and likewise the way that leads to the ceasing thereof". If we can analyse one human being, we shall have analysed the whole universe, because it is all built on the same plane.

The first and most important monosyllabic *mantra* is the sound *Om,* generally considered to be the sound-symbol of the Supreme One. Even the conception of the sound *Om,* which is the combination of the three *matras,* a, u, and m, presupposes geometrical patterns corresponding to a straight line, a semi-circle and a point. Every divine

form possesses a *bija mantra* or nuclear syllable. Even in its form as the smallest sound unit, the *bija* remains a microcosm and thus may represent the essential nature of a divinity.

At the vibratory level, sound creates light, for light is sound at a particular frequency. The colours the human eye can perceive result from within a very narrow range of the existing light waves; the entire scale of light's radiant energy (for example, ultra-violet and infra-red rays) is not visible as colour. But in Tantric thought, this wider concept of colour also exists in that every vibrating sound has a certain colour.

Every phenomenal object is seen as the concentration and reflection of light in a certain pattern. All forms *(rupa)* emerge in light and hence all names *(nama)* of forms; tangible matter and energy alike are dependent upon the existence of light, and light itself on Sound.

Every colour has its life-sound and in turn, every sound has its form-colour. All *mantras* have their corresponding colours and forms. When a *mantra* is pronounced correctly, its corresponding form begins to manifest itself, the quality of manifestation depending upon the nature and intensity of the pronunciation. When the *agni-mantra* is uttered, the colour red and the quality of heat are evoked. That is the subtle mantric effect.

The Tantras, on the yoga side, indicate the colours of the various vital forces observable by trance-vision. These colours are emerald *(prana)*, red like the evening sun *(apana)*, milky *(samana)*, white like the *dhatura* flower *(vyana)*, that of fire and lightning *(udana)*. Henry Miller rightly observes: "Ramakrishna, in his trances, experienced colours such as no man ever saw". (Remember to Remember, "The Bodhisattva Artist", p. 113.)

Organised and channeled in particular ways, sound-energy may produce or create particular results. Each *mantra* relates to the particular power or *devata* revealing itself in that sound-form. Knowledge of the techniques is therefore as essential as knowledge of the principles. Hence, the *mantras*, or "thought-forms", to be effective must be actually heard from the mouth of the *guru*, the spiritual preceptor. This science was the traditional possession of a few initiates who formed a closed circle and who guarded it with great care, permitting none save qualified aspirants to have access to it.

Such integrated sound identifies the ensuing relation of *mantra* with *yantra* and explains

why the *Gayatri mantra* must possess just its proper sounds, sixteen in a single relation, and no more. With them is evoked the corresponding *yantra*. Mantra gives formula and equation; *yantra*, diagram and pattern; and what correlates both systems of relations is Tantra.

Yantra is essentially a geometrical composition; but to understand its true nature, one has to go beyond the notions of geometry into those of dynamics. A *yantra* then represents particular force whose power or energy increases in proportion to the abstraction and precision of the diagram. Through such *yantras* or power diagrams, creation and control of ideas and physical forces are supposed to be possible.

The dynamic graph of the diagram of forces by which anything can be represented—the picture of its functional constitution—is called the *yantra* of that thing. It is not an arbitrary invention but a revealed image of an aspect of cosmic structure.

The linear *yantras* are composed of simple geometrical figures (line, triangle, rectangle, circle, etc.). They enclose the *mantra* syllables which, when properly grouped, will cause partial aspects of a definite image to emerge or germinate. Hence they are called *bijaskhara* or germinal syllables.

Rekha is the actual process of drawing the *yantra*. As a process, it evokes in sequence the forces which compose the network of a *yantra*. Its corners and angles fix the number and order of the nuclear syllables which it contains hidden within. It is thus a key to the unfolding of the visionary images. Rekha is the guiding principle for all ritual achievments. As prescribed, it underlies the formal disciplines of geometry, astronomy, temple architecture, and even of ritual dance and music.

Study of the *yantras* or diagrams will show that each primary geometrical figure can be induced to provide a series of linear and spatial proportions each one of which belongs essentially to all figures of the same shape, whatever their size in area. From these geometrical permutations we obtain certain related series of lines. The circle, the square, or the equilateral triangle, as well as the hexagon or pentagon, do not allow the vital departure from static equilibrium that is necessary for the emergence of emanated forms. The pentagon reveals this fact most easily, as does the square and its diagonals, and the double square and the diagonals inherent in it. With the subtle relations shown in the non-equal triangles—the scalene and isosce-

les—will be revealed some of the secrets of proportional lines in one figure. Taking the positive pentagon (and its negative ally, the pentacle) and drawing diagonals from (a) centre to angles, and (b) from centre to sides, two series of ten lines, having two lengths only, appear. This design is called Sri Yantra.

From the permutations of Sri Yantra and the pentagon, especially in their primary relations to circle and square, we can derive the actual proportional series that govern the relationship of the notes with the musical scales (*ragas* and *raginis*) and the derivation of the secondary *raginis* from the primary *ragas*. This is the secret of Sri Yantra with its corresponding *mantras*.

Yantra and the musical modes of the *raga* system are inherently related through their mathematically-proportioned foundation. Just as the basic notes of each *raga* are harmonised so are the visible lines in each *yantra*. And just as the musical string must be plucked in a particular fashion to sound a certain note, so must the *yantra* line be mastered and mentally plucked to bring forth its image or power. Thus, the *yantra* diagram of apparently static lines will, with mental application, vibrate in perfect relation like a finely tuned musical instrument.

"The so-called 'male' *ragas* are the pentatonic ones, roughly those beginning on different degrees of the pentatonic scale; the female '*raginis*' are six-, seven-, eight- or nine-note scales, some with intervals of as much as a third, or less than a semitone between their degrees. The *raginis* are grouped under the heading of one or other of the male *ragas*, and called his 'wives'. The scales are amplified, and their emotional qualities enhanced by the use of various turns, and patterns of chromatic or microtonal passing-notes at given places in the scale, according as the music moves up or down.

"The *ragas* thus have special spheres of emotion attributed to them, just as did the modes of classical antiquity. Their spheres are often described by listing the *ragas* according to their overriding feeling and the time of day—sometimes even the seasons of the year—when they should be played, e.g. '7th watch, calm mystery', '2nd watch, adoration' or '8th watch, love, laughter'. (Philip Rawson in his introduction in the catalogue: Music and Dance in Indian Art, published by the Royal Scottish Museum, Edinburgh, 1963.)

The *yantra* form is similarly constructed to induce, bear, and convey a particular pattern

Plate 7
Sri Yantra. Painting. Rajasthan. Late 18th century A.D. According to the Tantrasara, this celebrated *yantra* should not be drawn during night time. Private collection.

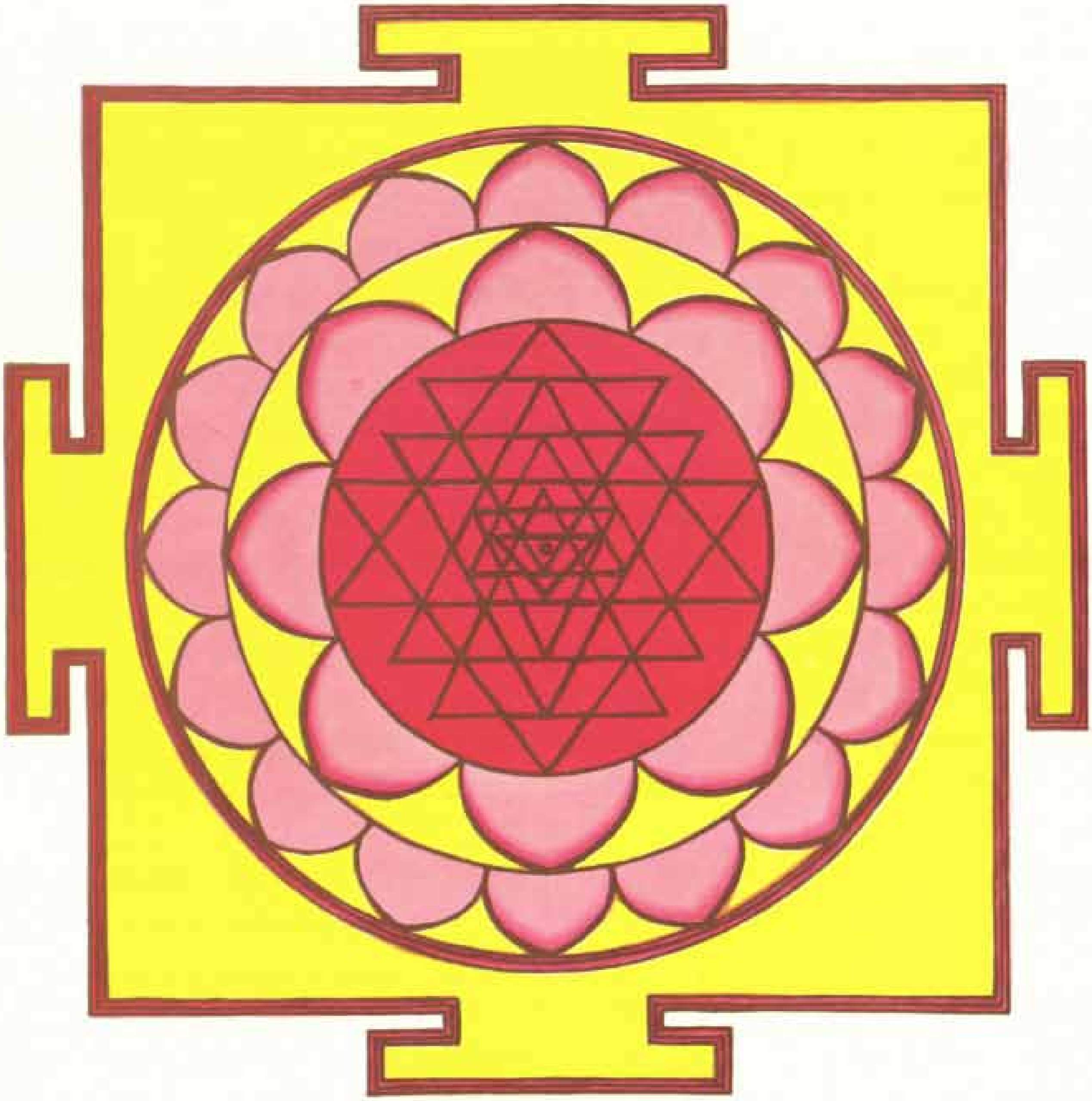
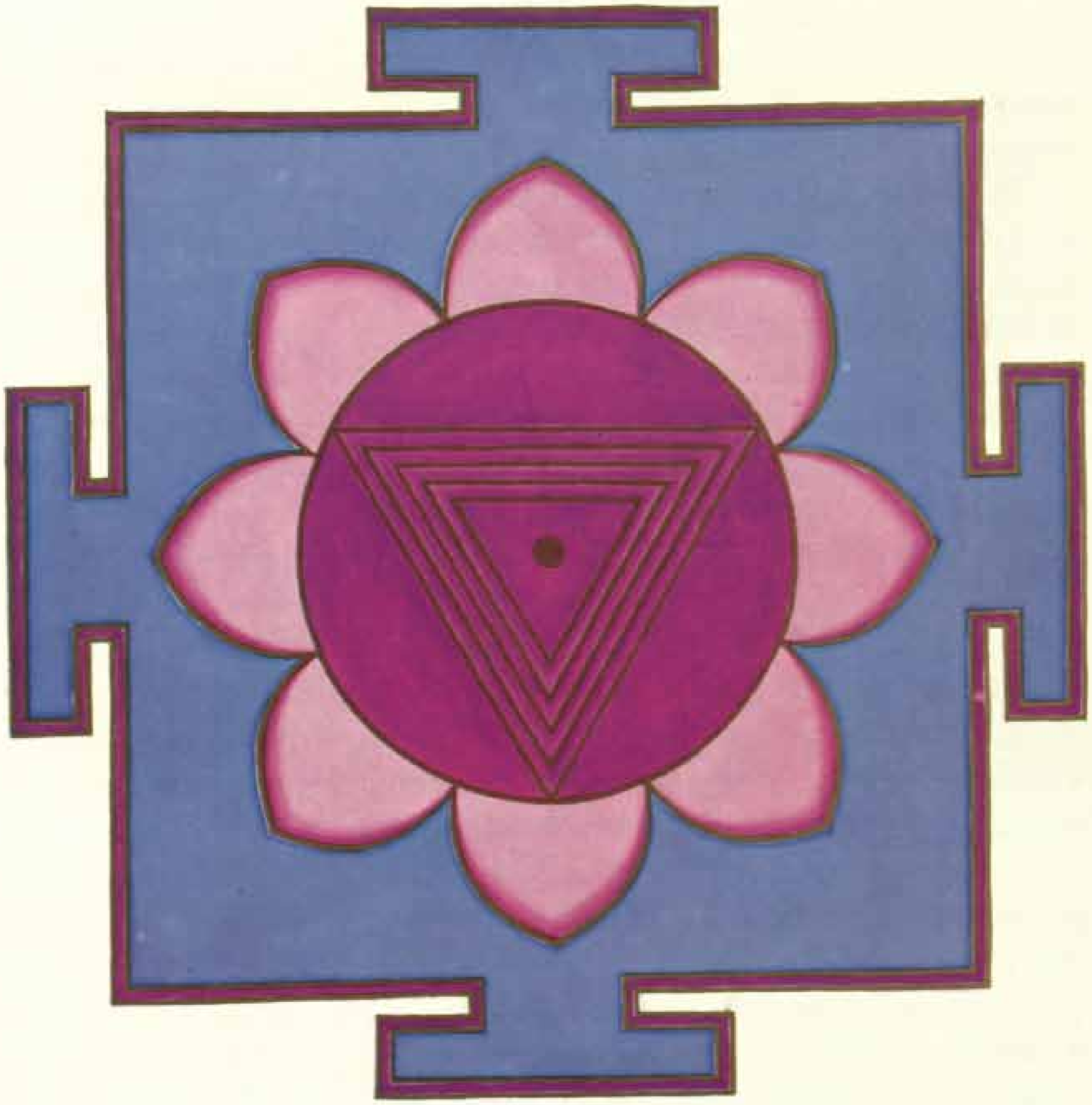


Plate 8

Kali Yantra. Painting. Rajasthan. Late 18th century A.D. The encompassing circle is *avidya* (ignorance); the eight-petalled lotus is the eight-fold Prakriti consisting of earth, water, fire, air, ether, *manas* (mind), *buddhi* (intellect) and *ahamkara* (egoism); the five triangles are the five *jnanendriyas* (*jnana*, knowledge; *indriyas*, senses), the five *karmendriyas* (motor organs) and the five *pranas* (breathing activities); and the *bindu* which is pure consciousness reflected in *maya* is the *bija*. Private collection.



of thoughts and forces. To get into that form is to get into that thought. To get into that form is to realize the impact of the force which that form creates.

The principle behind this is that, just as each form is the visible product of an energy pattern rooted in sound, so, reciprocally, each visible form carries with it its own implicit power-pattern.

We find a basic *raga* form in each of the five plane figures, each having the *sabda* (or stress) in the dual Siva-Sakti relations of mutual interpenetration: (1) circle and square, (2) square and rectangle, (3) equilateral and triangle, circle, also triangle and square, (4) ellipse or egg-form, (5) trapezoid, diamond, etc. Geometrical developments in line, carefully derived from within these basic plane figures, indicate lines possessing accurate successive proportions, all relative to the matrix figure. Each series is different from any other series, because the original proportional scheme differs in its succession, and so produces different lengths. The proportional scheme which is given visual definition in Sri Yantra, and auditory definition in the *raga,* is the key to the relationship between art and the metaphysics of sound.

The interaction of two five-sided figures (the pentagon and the five-pointed star pentacle) illustrates two kinds of energy action. The pentagon symbolizes the collected *prana* or energy while the pentacle represents the *karmendriyas* or the five separate organs of action. When we place the star upon the pentagon, five points extrude; these are the performers of action, the five lines they cross are the receivers of impact. Thus, one system is receptive while the other is active; but always the same fund of energy exists whether acted upon or acting.

The five-pointed star, the *panchakona,* has a remarkable series of evolved stars—each range is capable of development to infinity, whether drawn within the original star, or drawn externally; with the difference that, externally five similar series of proportional areas can be produced, increasing in size. All these evolved series possess subtle musical qualities, since they are parallel to certain rhythms of the energy patterns from which chemical elements are constructed. By this inherent power *mantra-yantra* may be said to build form, conserve form, or dissolve form.

Ceilings of Western Indian shrines frequently exhibit crystalline patterns, such as those in the Dilwara temples of Mount Abu. They present the unfolding of *sabda* in a sin-

gle field; though remaining balanced. A favoured pattern is the "square on square" development in three dimensions, revealed to suggest three planes. This pattern appears often in *mandala* modes. The pointed ceiling in the Minakshi temple in Madura represents the interchange between two fields of force, thus illustrating, by its radiating spiral forms, the initial movement away from the static mineral balance into the plant world, especially the lotus form with its open petals as a symbol of manifestation.

Alice Boner, in analysing the sculptured panels in the ancient cave temples of India, has pointed out that they reveal geometrical diagrams of analogous concentric construction. They have their own specific features which are different from those of devotional *yantras*. The circular area in their case, instead of being filled by intersecting geometrical figures, is divided into regular sectors connecting their points of intersection with the circle. All forms within the ambit of the circle are placed in correspondence with some of the diameters or with their parallels, and thus participate, directly or indirectly, in the concentric layout of the diagram. In this way all parts of a composition are related to a central point. This transforms a composition into a functional organism. An image conceived on such a pattern is never a static configuration even if the figures represented are at rest. (Principles of Composition in Hindu Sculpture, pp. 25–26.)

As long as these figures remain completely regular, their centre of force corresponds with the centre of their form; and with this total balance of matter and energy no activity results. But when these two centres (of force and of form) do not coincide, stress arises, following the mutual pull, in which the two centres try to become one. This fact becomes most evident in a comparison of the hexagonal and pentagonal figures. The hexagonal balance of forces is related to the crystalline structures of ice and snow. The pentagonal tends to predominate in plant form, but is there pulled by an external spiral force into non-equilibrium and produces forms of vital three-dimensional complexity. Thus it breaks into the sphere of life by reason of this movement of *desire*.

In a *yantra*, the spheroid can be considered as a sphere in the process of breaking itself into separate units, each with its own centre. It represents the division of wholeness for the sake of multiplicity. Therefore, the spheroid stands for the world-egg, the incipient

duality of Purusha (Person) and Prakriti (Nature). For each of the two units into which it separates is differentiated from the other. In Tantric painting, this division is indicated by the colours red and white, red symbolizing the feminine essence *(rakta)* and white, the male essence *(sveta)*. Without such difference there can be no *lila* or divine play. The creation, according to Vaishanava literature, is explained as the *lila* of God, a conception that introduces elements of spontaneity and freedom into the universe. *Lila* (the Relative) is correlative to *nitya* (the Absolute).

"At the time of destruction, the whole universe is reabsorbed into this power of creative illusion *(maya)* and the world's nature (prakriti), which is identical with creative illusion *(maya)*, is itself reabsorbed into Divinity (Isvara). The reabsorption of creative illusion is, however, not a complete annihilation, because, if it were, further creation would become impossible. Further, her reabsorption does not mean total disappearance because to be perceptible is of her very nature; if she were no longer perceptible she would have ceased to exist. But, because inclination towards action no longer exists, she remains immobile as in deep sleep. Even when illumined by the infinite light of divinity (Isvara) which is self-supporting and devoid of false knowledge (the knowledge of difference), she remains scarcely perceptible until, through the effects of duration *(kala)*, the action of all beings have become ripe and creation again springs naturally from the unconcerned God (Bhagavan). At the very instant at which actions attain maturity (the immanent and the efficient causes of the universe), creative illusion *(maya)* and essence (Purusa) arise." (Svami Hariharanand Sarasvati: The World and its Signification, JISOA, Vol. X. 1942, pp. 34–35.)

The duality that persists in *yantra* manifests itself in the magnificent doctrine of the Tantras as Siva-Sakti, or Purusha and Prakriti, as balance of form and energy. According to the Sankhya system of philosophy, the starting point in the creation of a universe is the combination of consciousness with energy quanta.

Siva stands for *asabda-brahman*, the unqualified one. Linga, according to the Skanda Purana, is the name for space in which the whole universe is in the process of formation and dissolution. Siva-linga, the all-pervading space, thus symbolizes a cosmic form, serenely detached and self-sufficient, whereas Sakti, the *sabda-brahman*, is the creative

impulse in the cosmic process. Gauri-patta represents *adya sakti,* the energy quanta; mahamaya, the power of manifestation; yoni, the primal root or the source of objectivation; Hence Siva-linga with Gauri-patta is the embodiment of both inaction and action. In the hands of the artist, this manifestation is expressed in the form of *linga-yoni* or vermilion daubs.

"If Prakriti from whom innumerable universes issue is the total *yoni,* so also the supreme spirit who rules over these innumerable universes is the total *linga,* and the eggs of the innumerable universes which spring forth from them are the creation." (Svami Hariharanand Sarasvati: The World and its Signification, J I S O A, Vol. X. 1942, p. 60.)

"There is no power (sakti) without a support and there is no support *(adhisthan)* without a power; but exists only in relation to each other. In this way Siva is identified with his own power (sakti) and this power (sakti) is himself (Siva). From this point of view it can be said that the *yoni* is a *lingam* and the *linga* a *yoni*..." (ibid, p. 69.)

In the egg-shaped *brahmanda,* the globe-shaped *salagrama,* or the Siva-linga the artist tries to release the symbols imprisioned in stone by a reduction of the material to its absolute essence. Matter is made to yield its intrinsic nature, the inert becomes alive.

Hence there is no flamboyance or associative corruption. Broad universality of impersonal form and content, and close relation to nature predestine this art to wide recognition and general acceptance. To give these figures depth and significance, they are placed under the open sky, below the banyan tree, in a serene godlike perspective.

The single static figure, like the great symbol of Purusha, does not move until it unites with its Sakti, the second figure of the standard series. From the ensuing action between these two figures, a series of mathematical proportions emerge. Their material forms, so mathematically harmonised, become clear from the abstract symbolism of the diagram.

All movement has its origin and consumation in *bindu,* or "point-limit", the invisible central point of a *yantra* which has existence, but no magnitude; for magnitude proceeds from the feminine power *(sakti)* or *bindu.* All creation, according to Tantra, is preceded by a focal tension, which is the centre of every creation.

Bindu carries within itself the seeds of its future, its multiple potentialities symbolically represented by the white and red points.

The microcosm of *bindu* illustrates the vital impetus in all things to multiply and reproduce. Whether matter reproduces its own kind as in cell-division or disintegrates into new kinds of matter as in the radioactive process, physicists now generally believe that all creation of matter proceeds from one fundamental substance.

Every kind of living matter is doing the same thing through consecutive processes of composition and decomposition. Creation and destruction are the very essence of every existence. All objects consist of an aggregate of atoms brought together by force. Disintegration is as much a normal and necessary aspect of nature as aggregation. The collocations of mass and energy are always breaking up, however slowly, however imperceptively, they are always being merged in the continual process of change which is the infinite, incomprehensible Prakriti. Nevertheless they are forever under the uniting influence of Siva-bindu. For Siva-bindu must not be conceived as a single point with a specific location. The truth is that there is no place in the phenomenal world where the one *bindu* will not be found.

So, *bindu* is the ultimate point of power beyond which a thing or energy cannot be contracted or condensed. At the same time as being the nucleus of matter *(jara)*, it is the nucleus of radiant consciousness *(chaitanya)*.

Bindu contains within itself the two 'poles' (zero and infinity) and all that lies between. Its inherent energy is the *alayavi jana* or *bindu* containing all potentialities and all polarities, subject and object, beginning and end, within and without, male and female. But for the actual creative process, *bindu* must evolve beyond duality to the *trikona,* the triangle, the first rectilinear figure to define dimension. The equilateral triangular shape standing on its base, the apex of each angle, a *laya* (absorption) point determined by the vertex, represents Purusha or Siva, the Immanent Principle. Standing on its apex, with its extensions dominating, it represents Prakriti or Sakti, the power of manifestation. These powers, according to Tantra, are not only active but also consciousness itself.

Sakti's diagram as a seat of creation, symbolizing the germinal light, must have been created by vision rather than by hands. It is an organic realization of the true balance of forces in the cosmos. In recent times, when Swami Vivekananda sat down in meditation, there appeared before him a very large, won-

derful triangle of light which he felt, was living. One day he came to the temple of Dakshinesvara to tell Ramakrishna about this, and the Master said, "Very good; you have seen the *brahmayoni;* while practicing *sadhana* under the *vilva* tree, I also saw it, not only that, but observed it giving birth to innumerable worlds every moment."

All manifestation is based on a fundamental dualism: a male principle known as Purusha (Person) and a female principle known as Prakriti (Nature). The Sankhya system of philosophy teaches that there are innumerable small parts of Prakriti which, keeping a small part of Purusha in the centre, move constantly around it. The most remarkable contribution of the Jains to atomic theory is their analysis of atomic linking, or the mutual attraction and repulsion of atoms in the formation of molecules. The question is raised in Umasvati's Jaina Sutras possibly dating from about 40 A.D.

We can thus here again evoke the image of a positive charge at rest in the centre, with a negative charge in motion around it. The negative electron is quick and moving, the positive proton at rest. Natural attraction is exhibited by opposite magnetic forces and electric charges. These opposite poles and charges create the magnetic and electric fields of force. Sexual intercourse is also an image for the process of oscillation generating energy. What is thus said about the atom applies both to the individual self and the whole cosmic system.

The apparent dual aspect of man as well as of the universe, has been symbolized in Buddhist Tantras by Prajnopaya. Prajna is the female aspect and Upaya is the male aspect. When represented or pictured in anthropomorphic forms, "they embrace each other, touching at all points of contact". This shows a total resolution of opposite forces as the two become essentially one.

According to Tantra, the ultimate truth is the union of Siva and Sakti, or Purusha and Prakriti. Siva represents pure consciousness which is inactive, the static aspect of the ultimate reality—while Sakti represents the world force, the kinetic energy of the concrete universe. The female aspect contributes the power to respond, to evolve. Every conjunction of opposites produces bliss *(ananda)* and ends in the rediscovery of primordial spontaneity. According to Jung the "mysterium conjunctions" on the human scale is the supreme image for integration.

Plate 9
Samvara and his sakti Vajravarahi. Painting. Nepal. c. 17th century A.D. The absolute unification of all duality is the real principle of union, which has been termed as *yuganaddha*. This principle of *yuganaddha* is clearly explained in the fifth chapter (Yuganaddha-krama) of the Pancha-krama. There it is said that through the purging of the two motions of creative process and absolute cessation, the state of unity called *yuganaddha* is attained. Here there is neither affirmation nor denial, neither purity nor impurity, neither form nor formlessness; it is a synthesis of all these dualities. Private collection.

Plate 10
Mystical form of Samvara with seventy-four arms embracing his sakti with twelve arms. Painting. Nepal. c. 17th century A.D. Private collection.

"When opposites unite, the lack of balance, the tension, from which all things are born, is removed and pleasure is experienced. Hence it is thought that the state of permanent stability is a state of perpetual enjoyment, a state of bliss. For the living being it is only in the union of opposites that the state of joy appears. Only during the brief moment when two beings become one, when desire is satisfied, is a fragment of joy experienced. This state is the closest image of the state of liberation." (Alain Danielou: Hindu Polytheism, p. 264.)

In his preface to the Koka Shastra, W.G. Archer also maintains that "In sexual rapture, there is a sense of self-extinction and this is a symbol of the soul's extinction in God. To love God, the lover was thus not only to obtain a mystical experience, but to win salvation" (p. 26).

Tantra also asserts that one must rise by that by which one falls. Tantra, whose technique is different, prescribes the discipline of sublimation. "Physical man and woman, floating along the outgoing current of the cosmic process, are, no doubt, different from each other, by the means of the return current they can be sublimated into cosmic principles and realised as the one whole, that is, Siva-Sakti. In reversing the outgoing current, that aspirant has to 'bring together' the complements or poles so as to realise their identity; thus the physical union of man and woman is sublimated into the creative union of Siva-Sakti." (Swami Nikhilananda: Hinduism, Its meaning for the Liberation of the Spirit, Chapter (IX) on Tantra: A Way of Realisation in Hinduism, p. 149.)

The aim of the Tantric ritual is to heighten forms of human power to their full expression so as to merge Kundalini, the unconscious form-principle in the human body, with Purusha, the formless consciousness. To achieve this aim, one utilizes the Tantric *yoga-asanas*, configurations of certain forces and moods. When one practices a particular *asana* 'with the mind fixed in abstract meditation' (as the Sanskrit root *yug* for yoga indicates), one may gain that particular intensified mood or feeling. The *mudras* (yogic postures and gestures) specifically produce physiological diagrams which fulfil the same functions as *mantras* and *yantras*, releasing particular forces and energies of the mind.

Kundalini Sakti, coiled and dormant cosmic power, is at the same time the supreme force in the human body. When *Kundalini* sleeps in the *muladhara chakra*, man is only

aware of his immediate earthly circumstances. When she awakes and unites with the supreme consciousness in the *brahmarandhra*, the reservoir of light, free from either heat or cold, man is no longer sensitive to his own limited perceptions but is instead participating in the source of light itself. Kundalini Sakti, when struck, shines like "millions of lightning flashes" in the centre of the *sadhaka's* body. Kundalini is the "Inner Woman". Of her it is said, "What need have I of any outer women? I have an Inner Woman within myself."

"The passage of the awakened Kundalini lies through the *sushumna*, which is described as the central nerve in the nervous system. A kind of hollow canal, the *sushumna* passes through the spinal column connecting the base centre *(chakra)* at the bottom of the spine with the centre at the cerebrum. Tantra speaks of six centres through which *sushumna* passes; these centres are so many spheres or planes, described in Tantra as different-coloured lotuses with varying numbers of petals. In the ordinary worldly person these centres are closed, and the lotuses droop down like buds. As the Kundalini rises through the *sushumna* canal and touches the centres, these buds turn upward as fully opened flowers and the aspirant obtains spiritual experience. The goal in spiritual practice is to make the Kundalini ascend from the centres which are lower and more veiled to those which are higher and more conscious. During this upward journey of the Kundalini, the *jiva* is not quite released from the relative state till it reaches the sixth centre or plane, which is the 'opening' for pure and perfect experience. At the sixth centre (two-petalled white lotus located at the junction of the eyebrows) the *jiva* sheds its ego and burns the seed of duality, and its higher self rises from the ashes of its lower self. It now dies physically, as it were, in order to be able to live in pure consciousness. The sixth-centre is the key by which the power in the thousand-petalled lotus in the cerebrum, which is like the limitless ocean, is switched on to the little reservoir which is the individual self, filling the latter and making it overflow and cease to be the little reservoir. Finally the Kundalini rises to the lotus at the cerebrum and becomes united with Siva, or the Absolute, and the aspirant realizes, in a transcendental experience, his union with Siva-Sakti." (Swami Nikhilananda: ibid. pp. 151–52.)

This state of union is beyond description, as it is beyond the dual and non-dual con-

ception; and so the yogins could only describe this state as "It is what it is." (Goraksa-Siddhanta Samgraha.)

When one fuses the separate elements of one's being, one realizes unity with the Universal Being. By yoking together the opposites within himself, the individual harmonises all experience, thereby abolishing duality and transcending the phenomenal world. As symbols for this transcendent union, the interlocking triangles of a sexagon *yantra* represent the male and female principles, the static and kinetic aspects of the two-in-one.

Owing to the complete intensity of embrace, the two all-pervading Ones, Siva and Sakti, become as it were a single principle in a bliss which is the highest non-duality. In the ultimate reality, however, there is neither Siva nor Sakti. Only the One without a second is ever existing and will ever exist, as infinite complexity in total unity.

All physical and mental forms, everything in the universe is that One, appearing in various ways. This has been very characteristically expressed by the Acaranga in the following statement: One who knows *one* knows *all*, and one who knows *all* knows *one*.

Life is one, and all its forms are interrelated in a vastly complicated but inseparable whole. Every act by any form of life, from the highest to the lowest, must react on every other form. "We are but links in a long series." We are made of the same element as the stars, the same substance as the gods. "All the men and women of the world are His living forms" as Kabir said. To realize the formless within one's living form is to reach the basis of all forms. All finite forms of experience are inseparable from the infinite, so, if one were able to pierce through the veil of form, he would see the relativity of both form-possessing and formless experience. What we perceive and feel is according to the Tantra-shastras the combination of the eternally formed *(svarupa)* and the eternally formless *(arupa)*.

Modern science is attempting to reduce the explanation of as many phenomena as possible to one single underlying principle. Such striving for unity has resulted in science's greatest achievement of this century: the dematerialization of matter. This concept maintains that the elements composing the universe can be symbolized by mathematical formulae which have a discoverable root. The monistic spirit developing in science corresponds to a recent development in

art, namely, the summarising of forces within the universe and the mutual assimilation of corporeal forms.

Through a process of transforming corporeal forms and mass, art has become an international expression. Although the style, influenced by different traditions, may vary, the fundamental language of art expression is understood everywhere. A great work of art indeed goes beyond the individual creator and belongs to all times and all men; yet, it belongs to no one and at the same time to everyone.

The artist expresses something that already exists, *sarvam,* of which he is a part and which he feels impelled to give back to the world. This process of communication becomes a way of life that creates concepts and forms whereby his deepest intuitions are crystallized and conveyed to others. Vijanabhiksu knew that the statue already existing in the block of stone is only revealed by the sculptor.

The *shilpi-yogin* has not attempted to absorb something external to himself, but to release something universal he has experienced inwardly. This unfolding lays bare the universal mental configurations: "Bild ist Seele", as Jung says. The *atman* manifests itself in images. The *shilpi*-yogin's concern rests not only with forms but with the forces that give rise to form. Art of this kind is firmly rooted in spiritual values. The artist is involved in a continuous process of discovery, not of himself, but of the roots of the universe which he has been able to discover within himself.

The artist's concern with the concept of space is an example of his probing to realize inner truths. He is telling in his own way what science informs us in another manner about our ordinary notion of space. When we are informed that the sharp point of the sharpest needle holds millions of bodies incessantly moving without ever touching one another, our everyday assumptions about space are shattered; with this mental habit and barrier removed, we are freed to see the inner reality.

Limitations are destroyed in order to attain that supreme liberation which is the aim of all true art, of religion, and of science as well.

Combining art, science, and religion, Tantrism indicates the way to liberation. With a basis of philosophy and physics, Tantra shows its art expression moving in the direction of meditation, toward the transcendance

of differentiated forms. In the *samadhi* state of meditation, one can look into the universe as a whole. It is to rise beyond the space-time relationship, to discover the idea of past, present, and future all at once. According to Tantra, only one single moment is actual; the whole universe evolves in that one single moment.

The eye, as an instrument of vision, cannot see beyond certain dimensions, namely, those of length, breadth and thickness. Forms and shapes with more dimensions are not perceived optically. Even three-dimensional forms are seen only partly, never in their totality. The mind connects one part with another in order to form a picture of the entire three-dimensional form.

Moreover, the observed part is coloured by the way in which it is perceived. The shape of a thing, its colour, its temporal-spatial position may be seen differently by each individual observer. Things are as they appear to the perceiver, for sensory perception by itself cannot go beyond appearances.

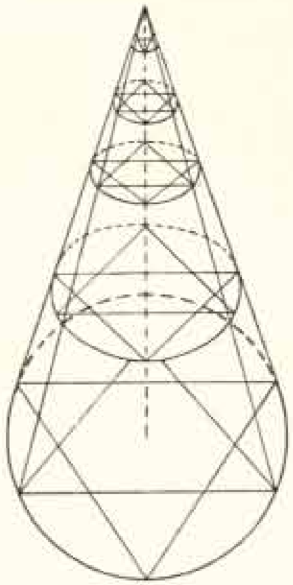
If one could apprehend reality under four dimensions, our concept of a stone would assume a higher degree of truthfulness, while at the same time the entire world would display an infinite series of individual histories. Through trance-vision, one sees or hears the particles moving within the stone, and one has a finer insight into the structure of the universe. Science reduces a block of wood or stone to molecules, atoms, electrons, protons, and neutrons—until the wood or stone exists as a series of electrical radiations. Such a nuclear reality, as realized by modern science, has yet to be convincingly actualised in art.

It is only when we both integrate all form and gain intuition of the endless play of Sakti, as Tantras indicate, that we find reality and become free. When we close our eyes we can really look at things. We see without seeing, to be exact. In the ultimate act of vision the body meditates as well as the mind. The Isha Upanishad says: "He alone sees, who sees all beings as himself." The unknown is within, in every atom of our being.

To the question: "What is that which, when known, all is known?" The Upanishad affirms "that art thou", or "Sa'ham, I am She, or So'ham, I am He." If one fully understands and accepts this, it compels one to empty one's mind of image and preconceptions. With a mind thus emptied, one can perceive the total impact of the art work. Once the work of art is finished, the artist's

power is released and exists within the form—its force and form accessible to one who can see and assimilate its impact. As the author of Chieh Tzŭ Yüan expresses it: "When painting has reached divinity (shên), there is an end of the matter." (Coomaraswamy, Transformation of Nature in Art, p. 22.)

It is not astonishing that many great Indian artists, who passed through this discipline, finally became saints.



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"She is Light itself and transcendent. Emanating from Her body are rays in thousands, two thousand, hundred thousand, ten millions, hundred millions there is no counting their great numbers. It is by and through Her that all things moving and motionless shine. It is by the light of this Devi that all things become manifest."

Bhairava-Yamala

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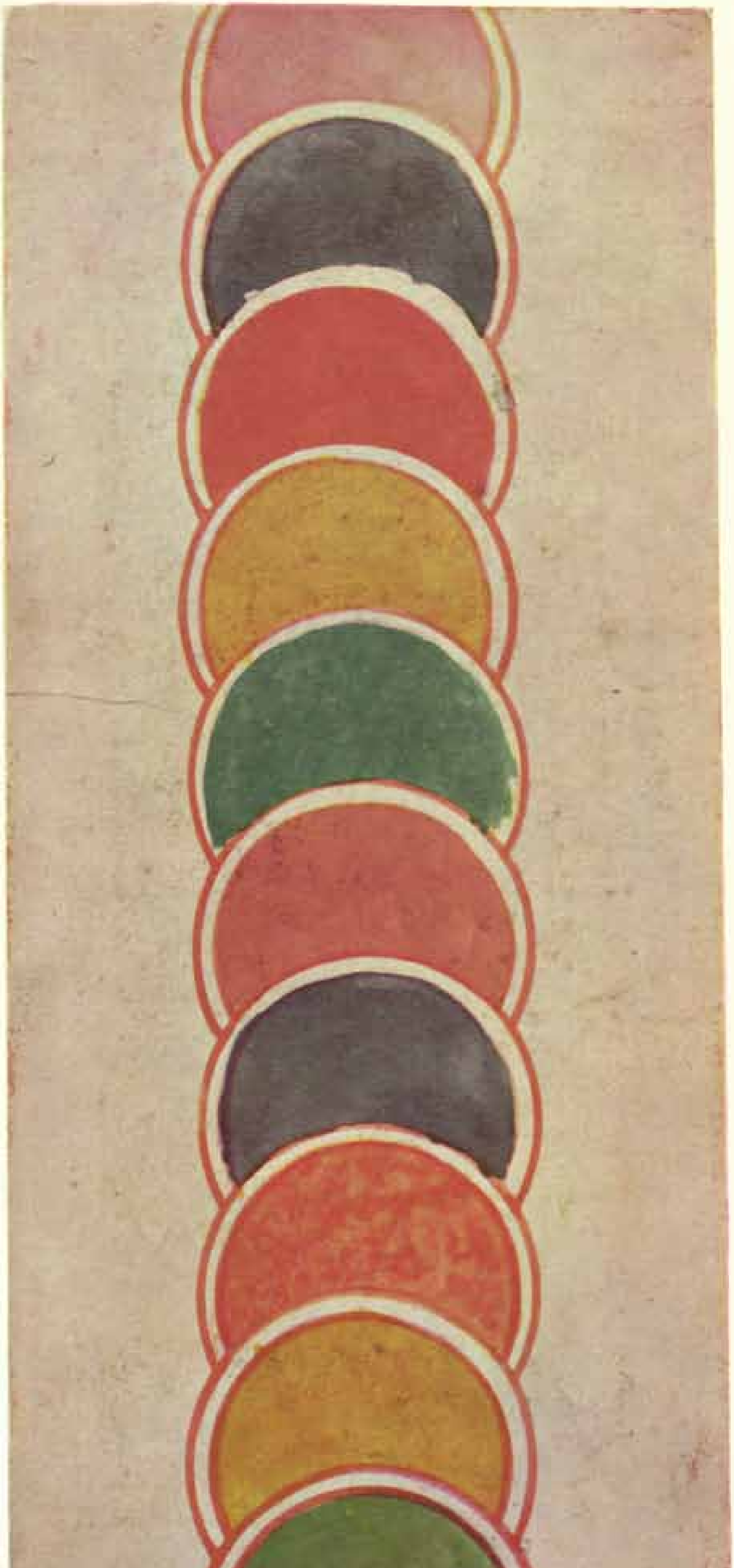

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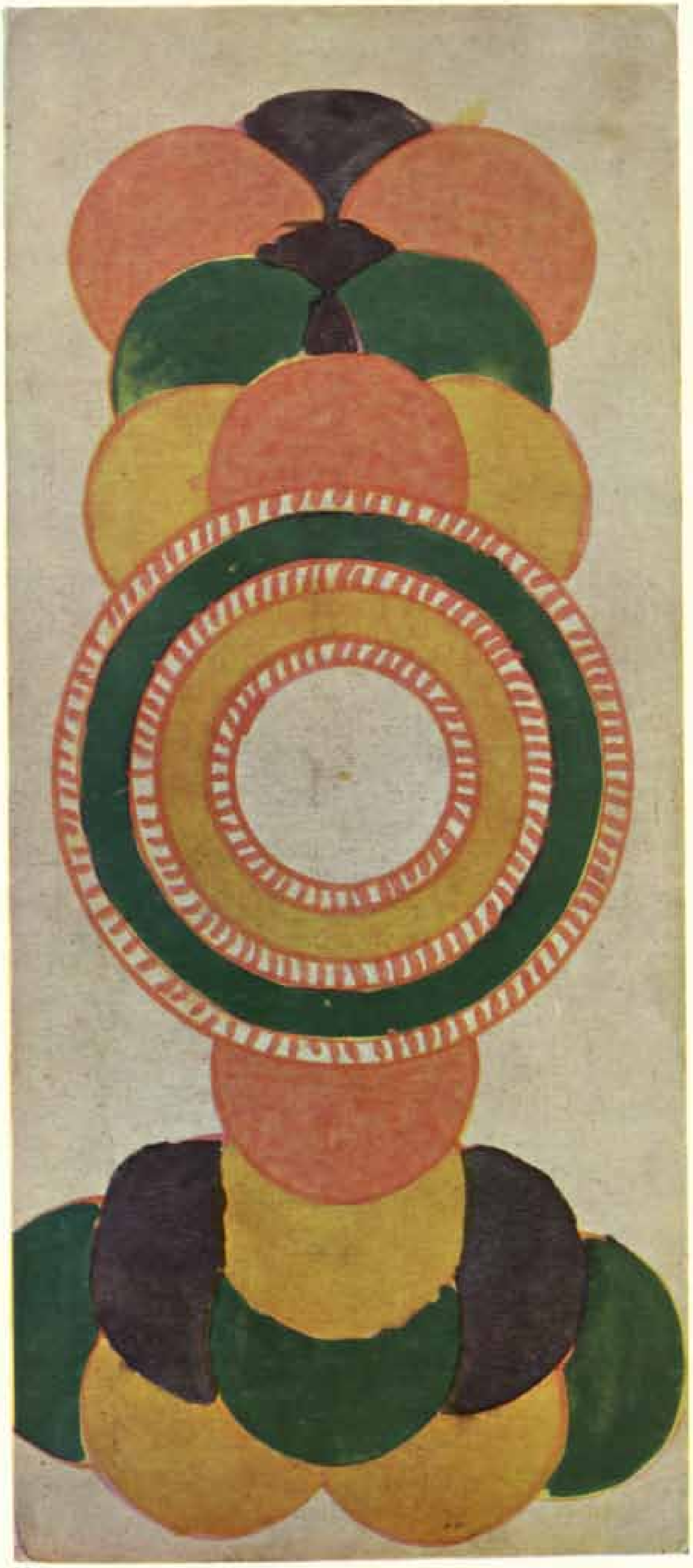

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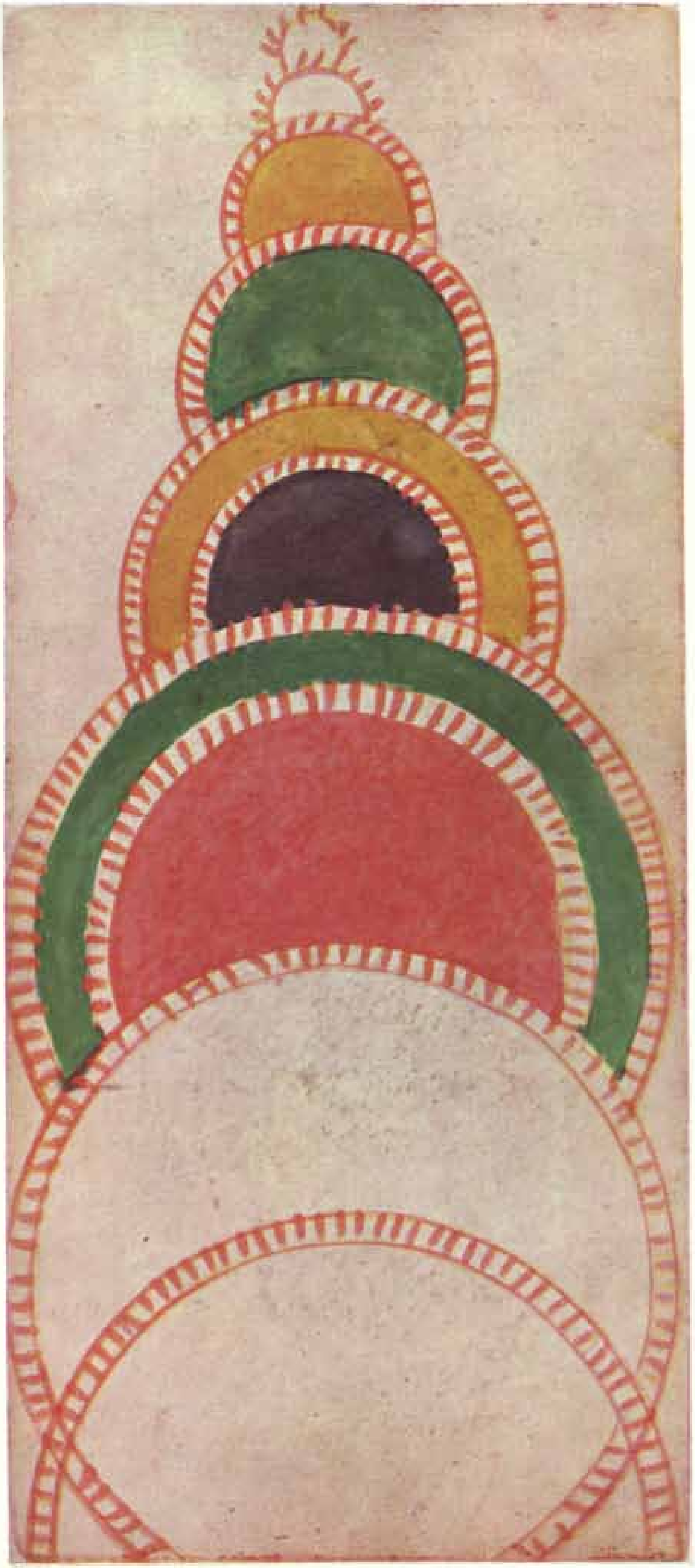

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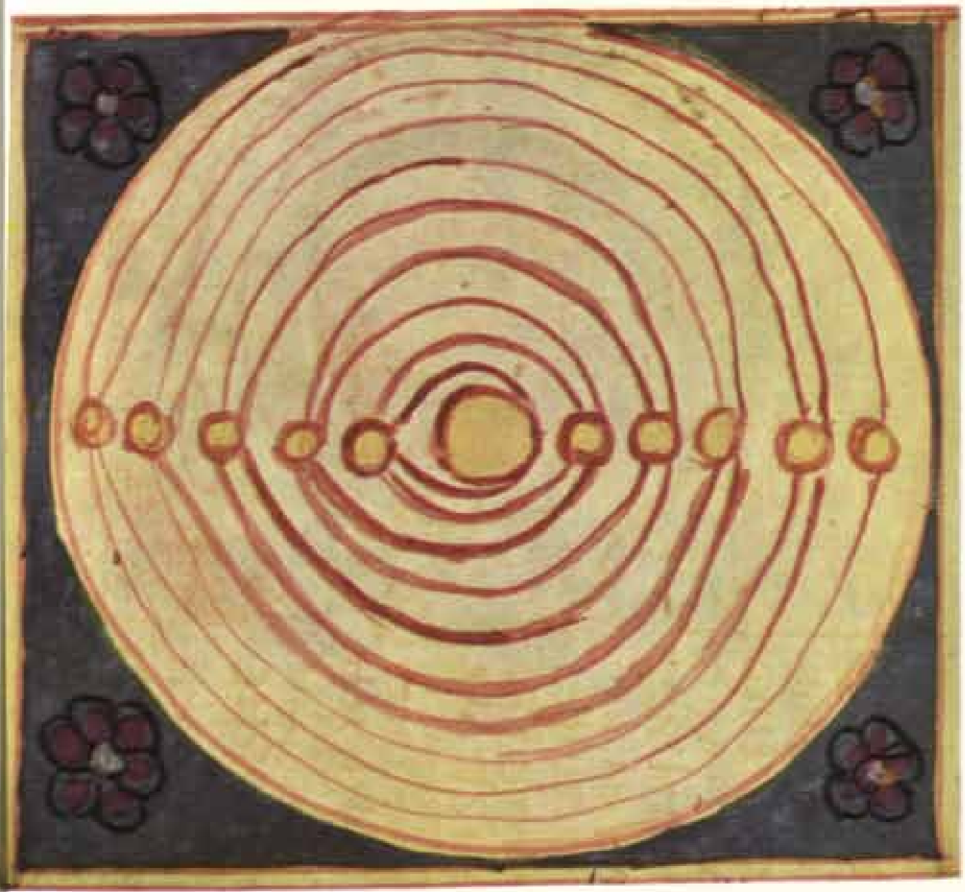

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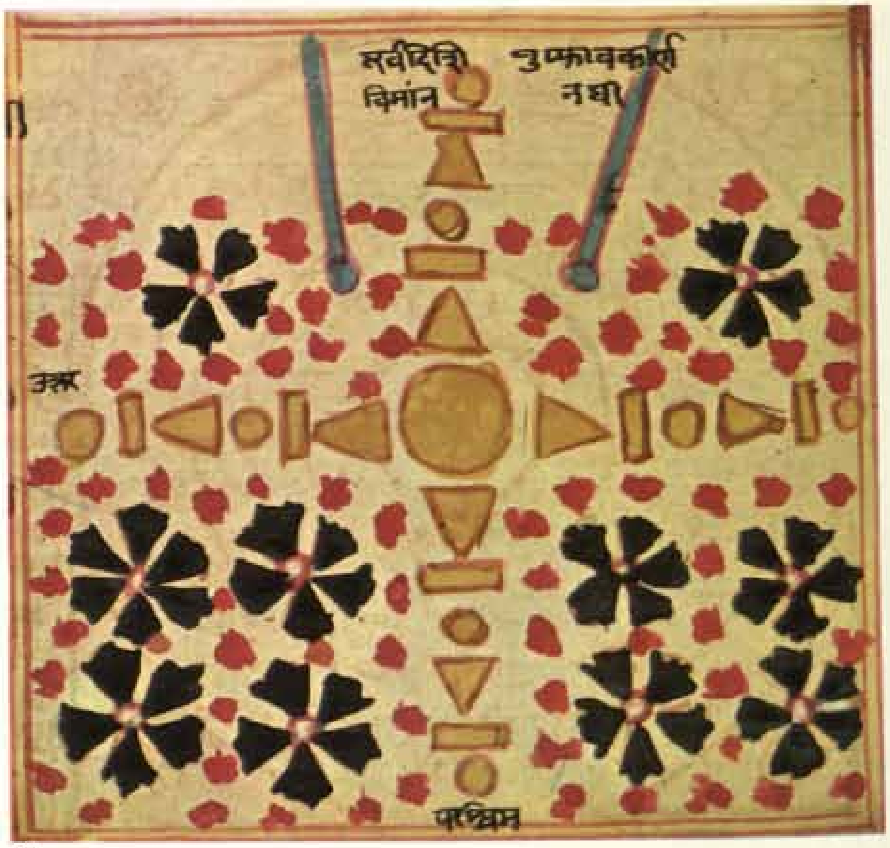

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Description of plates, chapter 1 and 2

Plates 1–4
Bindu. Painting. Rajasthan. c. 18th century A.D. The universe conceived either as the most minute or as the encompassing Brahmaspheroid consists of *sveta* or white *bindu* and *rakta* or red *bindu* intimately related. In terms of Tantric *sandhyabhasa* (secret language) *sukra* (colour: white) and *rakta* (colour: red) are known as *karpura* (camphor) and *dhupa* (frankincense). The white *Bindu* is the fundamental point of repose out of which emerge transformation and evolution. It signifies the starting point in the unfolding of inner space, as well as the last point of its ultimate integration. It is the point-limit from which inner and outer space take their origin and in which they again become one. Private collection.

Plate 5
Devi as Chandi (detail). Clay. Kumartuli, Calcutta. Contemporary expression of ageless traditional form. Private collection.

Plate 6
Hevajra and his sakti. Stone. Bengal. Pala style. c. 11th century A.D. The union of the male and female principles is a symbol of eternal communion and an awareness of Oneness through duality. From the Tantric point of view, the consummation is the human being, man and woman comprised as one unit. Indian Museum, Calcutta.

Plate 7
Sri Yantra. Painting. Rajasthan. Late 18th century A.D. According to the Tantrasara, this celebrated *yantra* should not be drawn during night time. Private collection.

Plate 8
Kali Yantra. Painting. Rajasthan. Late 18th century A.D. The encompassing circle is *avidya* (ignorance); the eight-petalled lotus is the eight-fold Prakriti consisting of earth, water, fire, air, ether, *manas* (mind), *buddhi* (intellect) and *ahamkara* (egoism); the five triangles are the five *jnanendriyas* (*jnana*, knowledge; *indriyas*, senses), the five *karmendriyas* (motor organs) and the five *pranas* (breathing activities); and the *bindu* which is pure consciousness reflected in *maya* is the *bija*. Private collection.

Plate 9
Samvara and his Sakti Vajravarahi. Painting. Nepal. c. 17th century A.D. The absolute unification of all duality is the real principle of union, which has been termed as *yuganaddha*. This principle of *yuganaddha* is clearly explained in the fifth chapter (Yuganaddha-krama) of the Pancha-krama. There it is said that through the purging of the two motions of creative process and absolute cessation, the state of unity called *yuganaddha* is attained. Here there is neither affirmation nor denial, neither purity nor impurity, neither form nor formlessness; it is a synthesis of all these dualities. Private collection.

Plate 10
Mystical form of Samvara with seventy-four arms embracing his sakti with twelve arms. Painting. Nepal. c. 17th century A.D. Private collection.

Plate 11
Consciousness. Painting. Rajasthan. c. 18th century A.D. Detail of a page from an illuminated manuscript. Photograph: Archaeological Survey of India.

Plate 12
Payodhi-jala or the primordial waters. Painting. Rajasthan. c. 18th century A.D. The force of the manifested universe, whether primordial water or primordial atoms, originate with the one pervading basis and source of all being. Private collection.

Plates 13–19
Sristi (Creation of the Universe). Painting. Western India. c. 18th century A.D. From a manuscript of the Suddha-chittavani or course of correct understanding. *Sristi* automatically involves three co-existing forces: *Sristi*—Creation—*Kriya Sakti; Sthiti*—maintenance—*Maya Sakti; Sambara*—dissolution—*Kala Sakti*. Private collection.

Plate 20
Universe and terrestrial atmospheres. Painting. Rajasthan. c. 1800 A.D. The strata with a total of sixty-three layers both in the upper and nether worlds merge into boundless space. In Indian painting, a solid background of red colour signifies spatial mass consisting of atomic particles. Space is again divided into *loka* (universe) and *aloka* (non-universe-space). Across it run two lines of force, mutually balanced. The density of the lowest curving band, i.e. the outermost atmosphere is said to be 60,000 *yojanas*. Private collection.

Plates 21–22
Planetary orbits or *nakshatramandalas*. Painting. Rajasthan. 1712 A.D. From a manuscript of the Samaranganasutradhara by Bhojadeva (1018–1060 A.D.), dealing with astronomy and other physical sciences. Private collection.

Plates 23–24
Aggregation of stars. Painting. Rajasthan. From a Samaranganasutradhara Ms. dated 1712 A.D. Private collection.

Plate 25
Kshetra or "field". Painting. Rajasthan. From a Samaranganasutradhara Ms. dated 1712 A.D. Measures of time and space showing *jagatshreni* (base line of the universe) and *loka ghana* (volume of the universe). The Jaina *acharyas* have long worked with number of the order of millions, even conceiving of infinity as a unit. The smallest measure of time mentioned by the astronomer is the *truti*, which is $^1/_{33\,750}$ of a second. The smallest measure of length mentioned in the Silpasastras is the *paramanu* which is about $^1/_{349\,525}$ of an inch. (Sir Brajendranath Seal: Positive Science of the Ancient Hindus.) *Paramanu* is also a name given to that particular unit of time required for the passage of the sun over an atomic object, mathematically calculated in the Siddhantasiromoni to be 17,496,000,000 *paramanus*. Time is like a line consisting of infinite points of time, each occupying only one point of space or *pradesha*. An instant, or one time-point, is called a time-atom, *kalanu*. *Uddhara Palya* is used for numbering continents or oceans, *Addha Palya* for calculating the duration of *karmas*, and *Vyavahara Palya* for numbering the hair-ends. If one hair-end of earth were taken out in digging a pit every 100 years, the time-unit thus consumed would be one *Vyavahara Palya* or 41,345,263,030,820,317,774,951,219,200,000,000,000,000,000,000 years. Private collection.

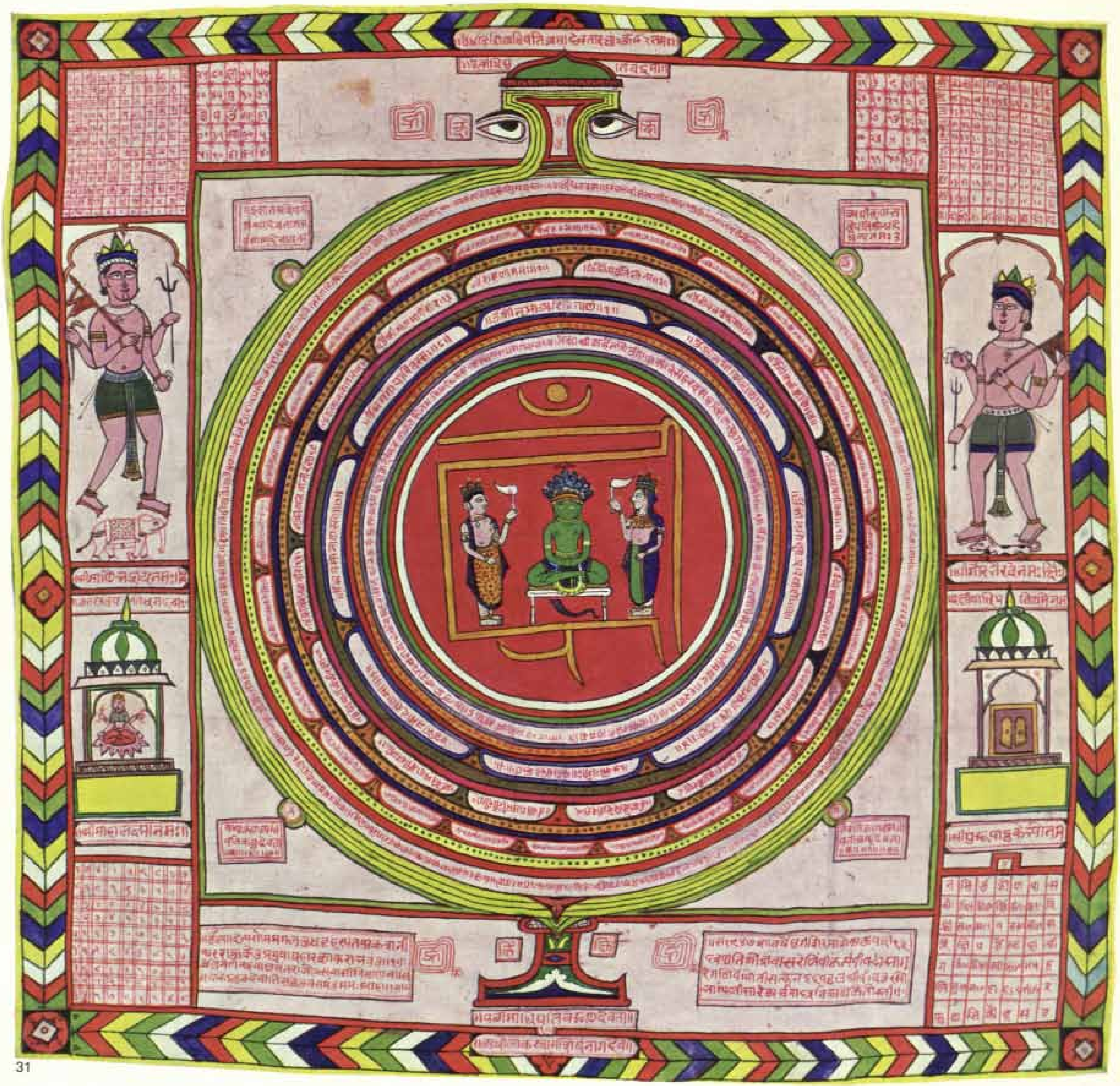
Plate 26
Lavana (salt) Samudra (sea). Painting. Rajasthan. From a Samaranganasutradhara Ms. dated 1712 A.D. Private collection.

Plate 27
Distance of upper sphere. Painting. Rajasthan. Samaranganasutradhara Ms. dated, 1712 A.D. Surrounded on all sides by *ghanadadhi* (the humid), *ghana* (the thick) and *tanu* (thin), *vata-valayas* are sheaths of atmosphere. Private collection.

Plate 28
Kaladadhi Samudra (sour-milk sea). Painting. Rajasthan. From a Samaranganasutradhara Ms. dated 1712 A.D. Origin and growth of *Jambudvipa*, the central continent, surrounded by fish symbols. According to the geological theory of the evolution of organic life on earth, the appearance of fishes marks the second stage. None existed in the Azoic era which began approximately 2,000,000,000 years ago. Fishes appeared about 500,000,000 years ago in the Palaeozoic era. Private collection.

Plate 29
A page from a Samaranganasutradhara Ms. Painting. Rajasthan. 1712 A.D. Private collection.

Plates 30–31
OM-HRM. Painting on cloth. Rajasthan. Early 19th century A.D. Om is the most basic and all-inclusive of sounds. As an important monosyllabic mantra, it is generally taken to be the sound-symbol of the Supreme One. Jain cosmology has survived on the whole uncorrupted, but over the years copyists introduced errors and distorted verses. Prof. Tucci rightly states that a *mandala* is not a "cosmogram" but a "psychocosmogram", a scheme of disintegration from the one to the many and its reintegration from the many to the the One, to that Absolute consciousness. "The Jainas hold that each and every entity is related to all entities other than itself in the universe in some relation or other. These relations are called *paryayas* (modes) of the entity. In order to know an entity completely, these relations of *paryayas* are to be completely known. And hence it follows that the complete knowledge of one entity involves the complete knowledge of other entities as well." (Tatia: Studies in Jaina Philosophy, p. 70.) Private collection.



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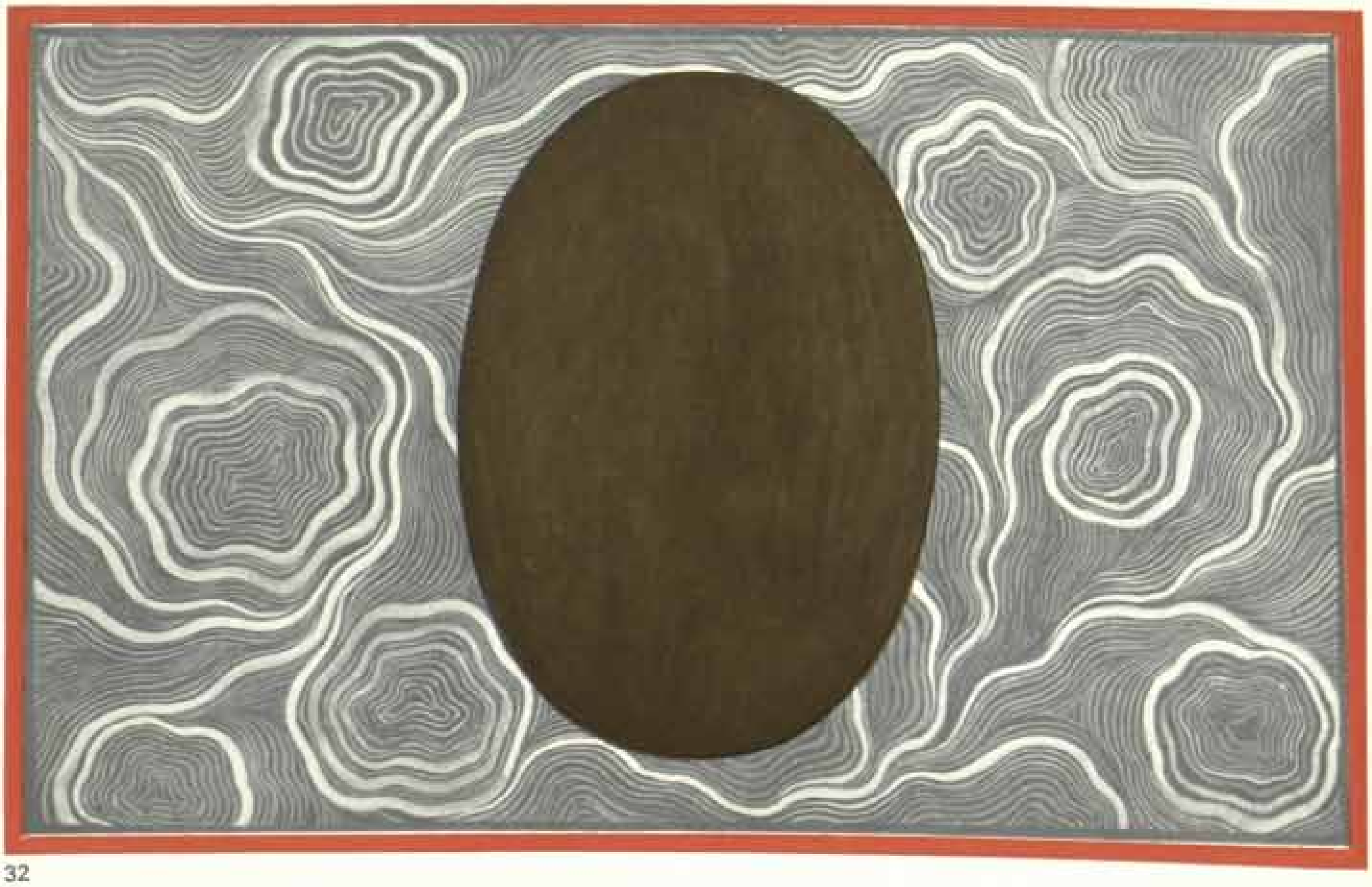
3

"Thou art formless, though possessing form, for by means of Maya Thou dost assume innumerable forms according to thy desire. Thou Thyself art without beginning, and yet art the beginning of all. It is Thou who creath, preserveth, and destroyeth the world."

Mahanirvana Tantra



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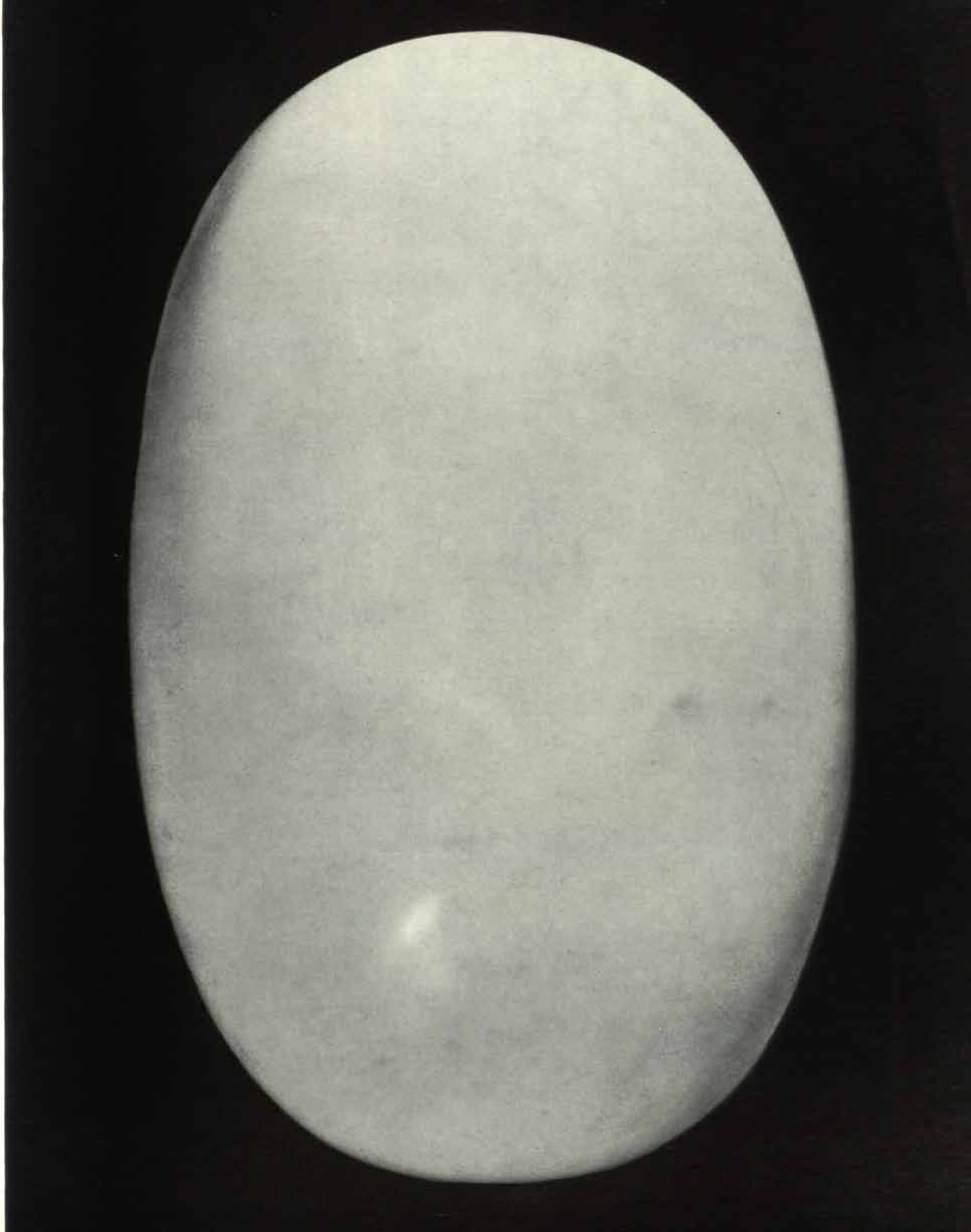

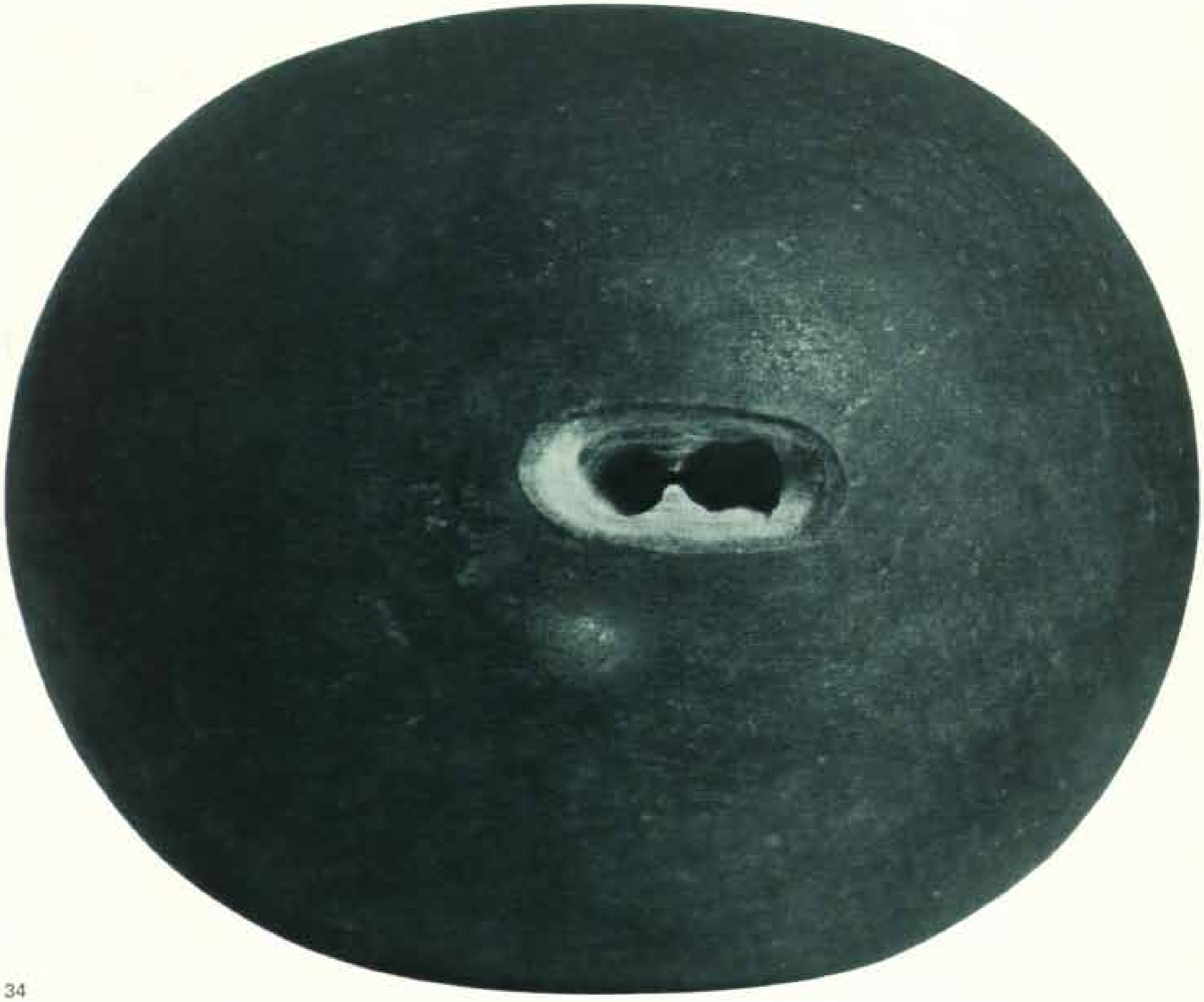

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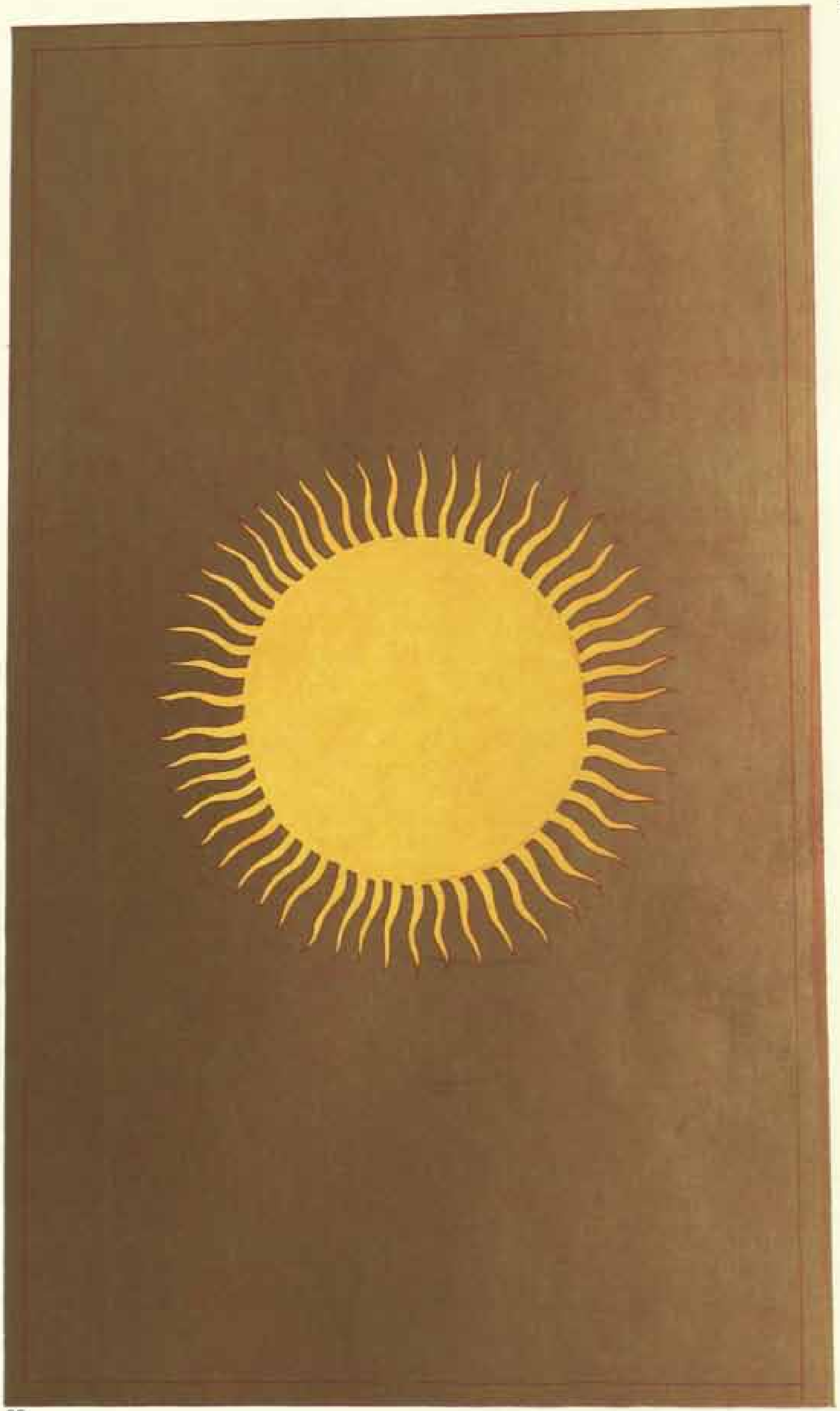

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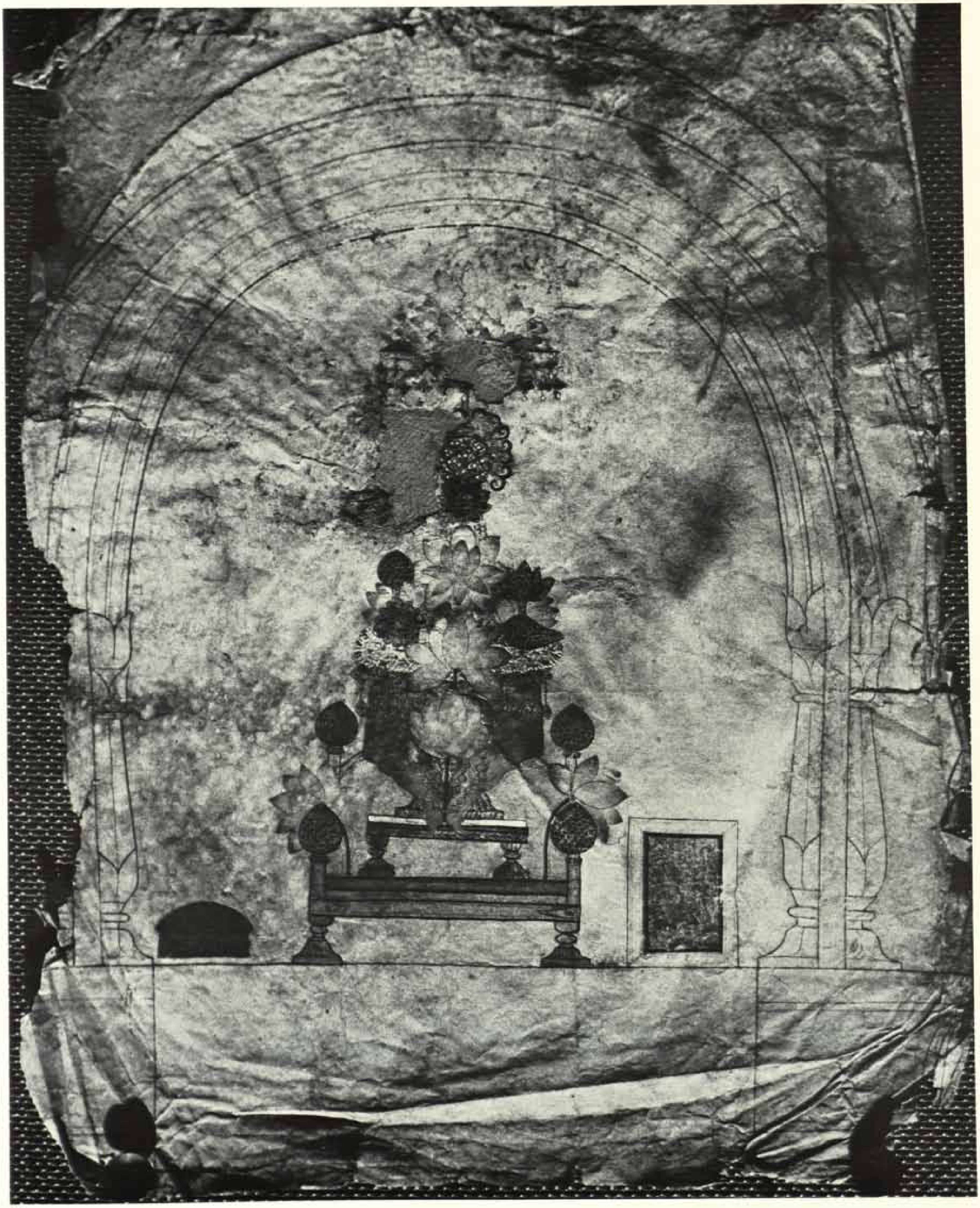

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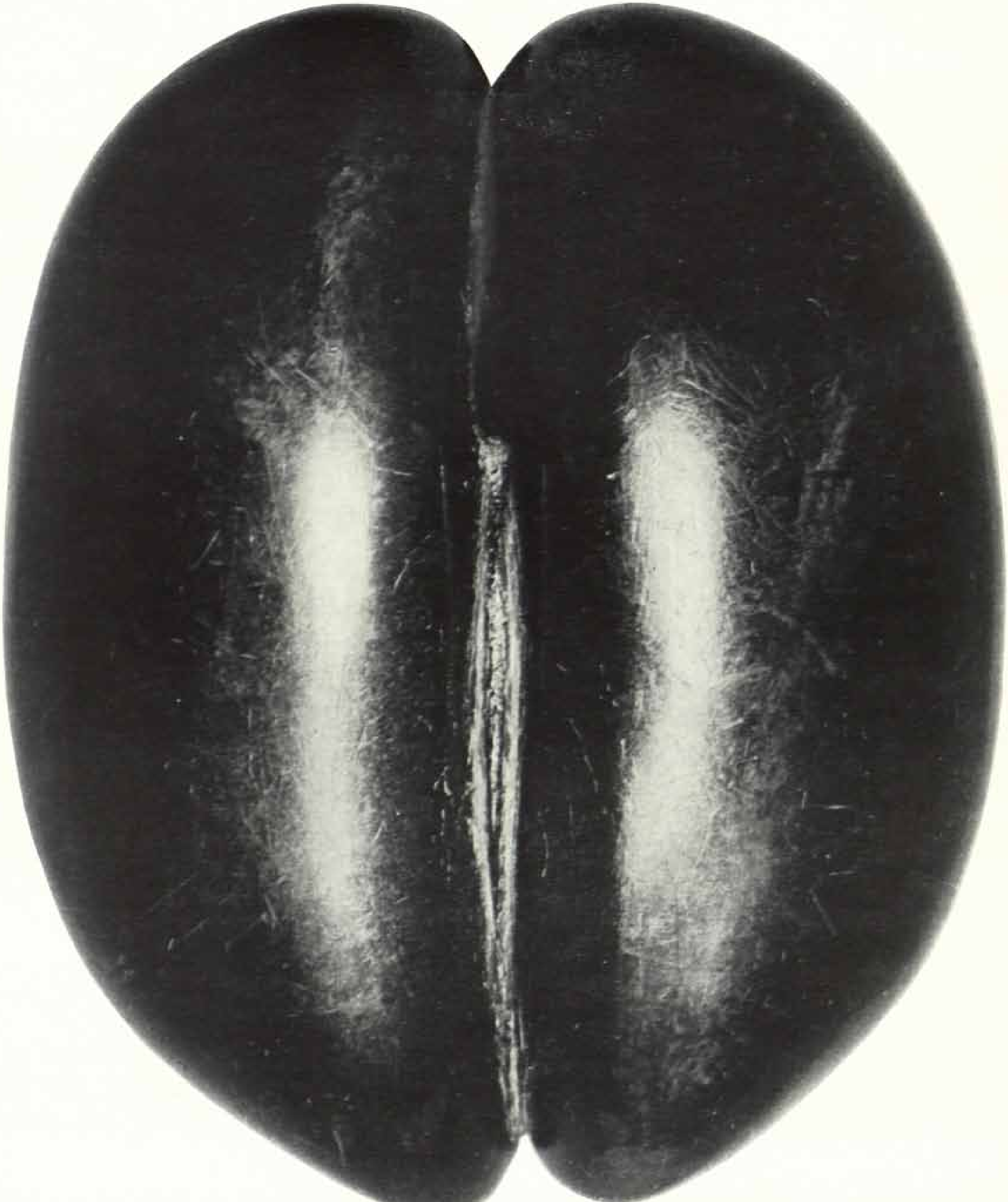

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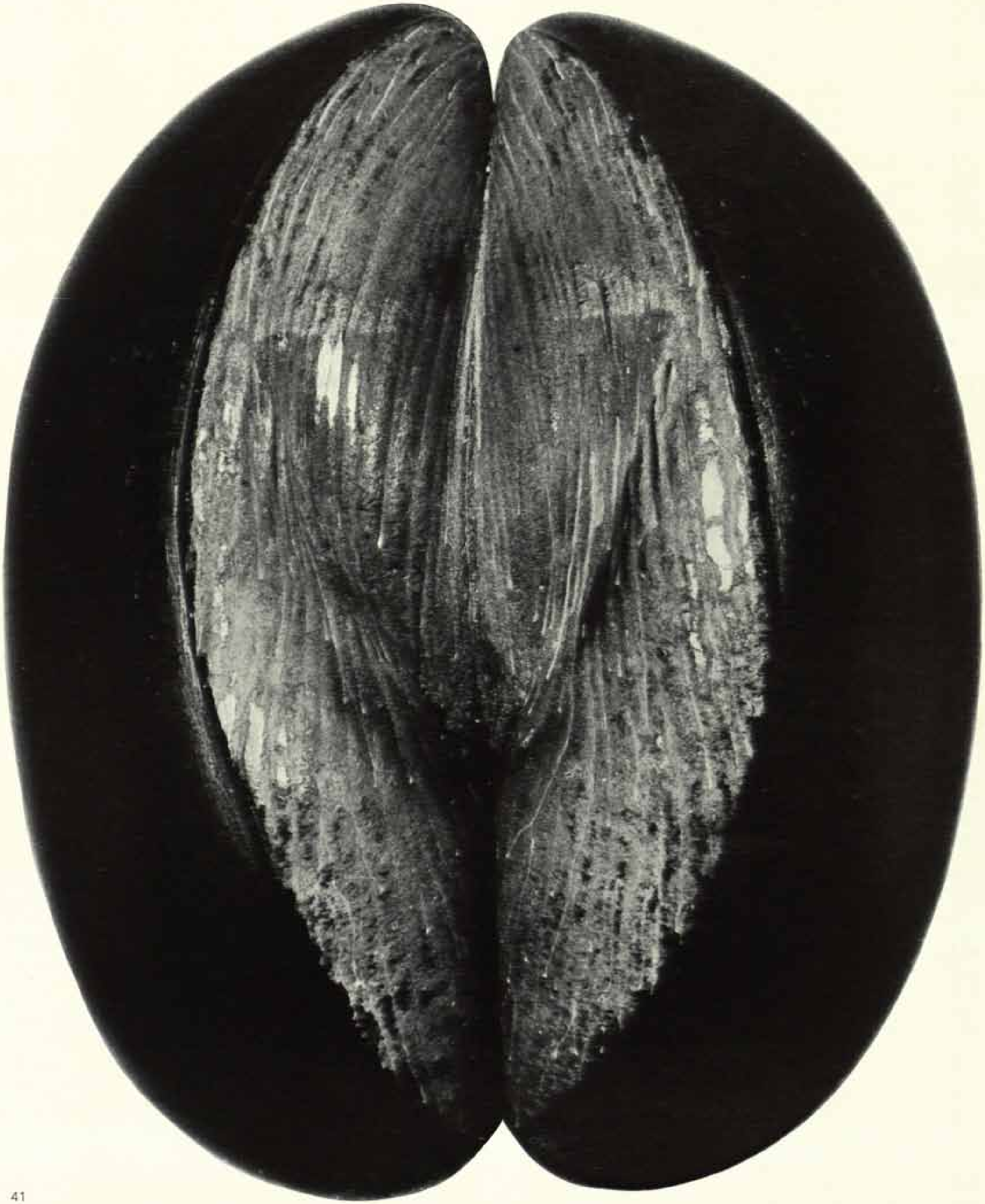


41

Description of plates, chapter 3

Plate 32
Hiranyagarbha. Painting in gold. Tempera. Kangra school. c. 1775–1800 A.D. Hiranyagarbha or the Golden Germ symbolizes the birth of the cosmos. That Golden Germ, source of energy for all being, lived for a thousand years in the egg-shell floating in the primordial waters. Bharat Kala Bhavan, Banaras.

Plate 33
Brahmanda. Stone. Banaras. Contemporary expression of ageless traditional form. The Prapancasara Tantra states that Sakti, as *dhvani* (resonance) or *nada* (sound), pervades the Brahmanda, or spheroid. This sound, or *sabda*, generates the rhythms which evolve, sustain and destroy every form. Private collection.

Plate 34
Salagrama. Stone. Banaras. Contemporary expression of ageless traditional form. Symbol of Lord Narayana, or Vishnu. The egg-shaped Brahmanda, the globe-shaped Salagrama, or the Sivalinga—each is both concept and culmination. Private collection.

Plate 35
Jyoti or light. Tempera painting in gold. Deccani school. c. 18th century A.D. Light is the radiant manifestation of energy. The visible universe is the panorama of reflected images of forms created and produced by light. Private collection.

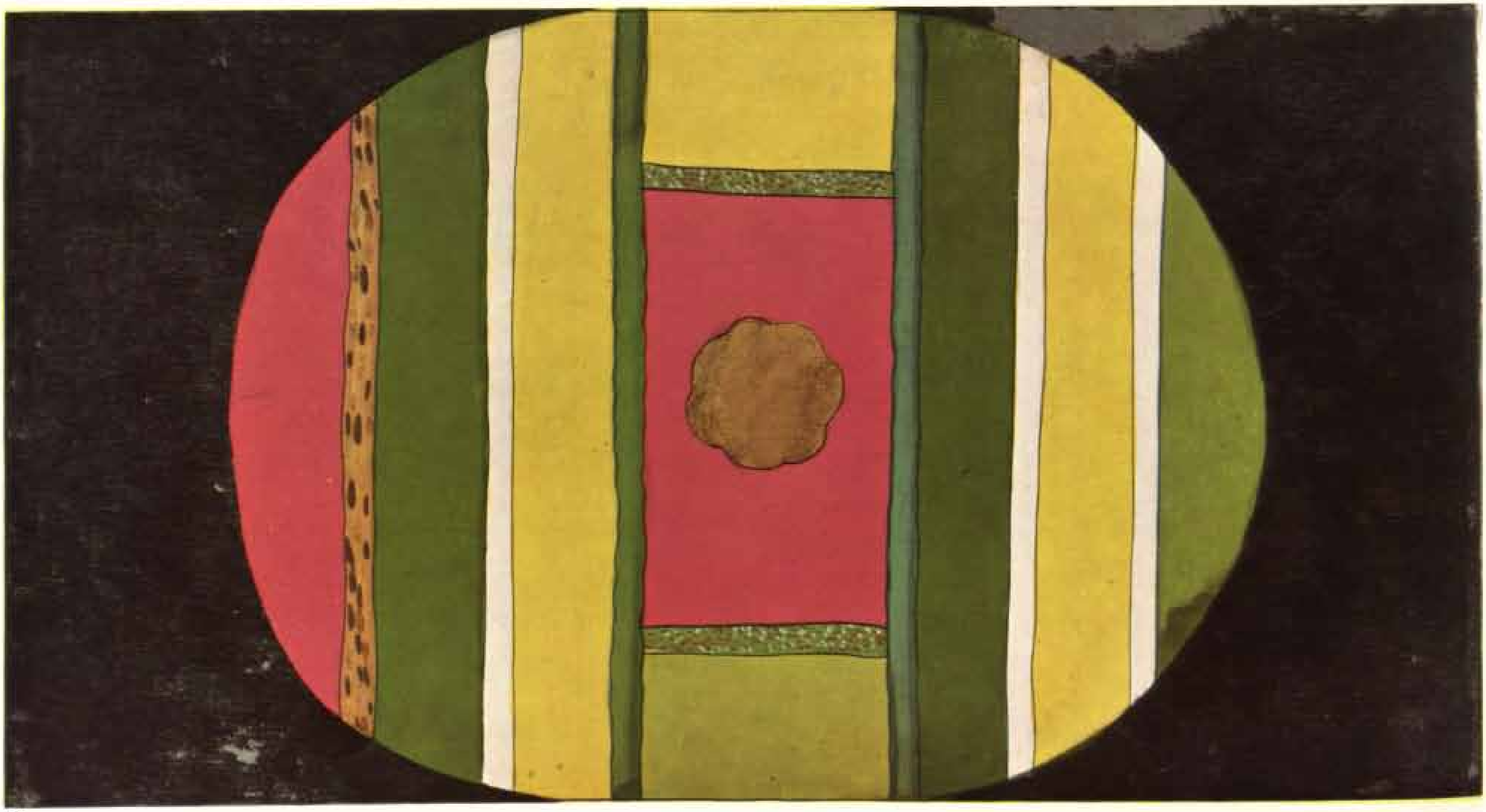
Plate 36
Agni-tattva (the principle of fire). Painting in gold. Tempera. Rajasthan. c. 17th century A.D. A page from the illuminated manuscript of the Bhagavata Purana, written in Arabic script. Each Tantric principle manifests the form, colour, and action of its particular vibration. A placental cloud of matter hides *agni*'s background. Private collection.

Plate 37
Narayana. Painting. Rajasthan. c. 18th century A.D. Conceived in lotus forms, each lotus being a separate *chakra*. Private collection.

Plate 38
Cosmic Moon. Painted wood. Thanjavur (Tanjore). c. 18th century A.D. On the reverse, the Cosmic Sun. Private collection.

Plate 39
Navkara Mantra. Painting. Jain. Rajasthan. 18th century A.D. Private Collection. Mantras 'words of power' are based on the esoteric properties believed to be inherent in sound. The mantra in this sense has been defined as a thought movement, or an articulated astral potency. Mantras were sometimes revealed to the rishis by direct vision after long meditation on the mysteries of sound. Every ritual has its own prescribed formulas and words of power appropriate for the occasion, and great stress is laid on the proper recitation of mantras for, much of the efficacy of a rite depends on their correct use. Mantras are often called from the number of syllables they contain – here it is panchakshara, 'five-syllabled'. Each of the five mantras are given their different colours and numbers and then the chart is drawn of their rythmic combinations to achieve the best result of the Mantras visually. Unlimited powers are said to reside in the shorter mantras, especially the mystic syllables known as the bijakshara (monosyllabic) mantras, and great potency accrues from their repetition in certain order.

Plates 40–41
Yoni. Coco-nut shell (back and front view). South India. Early 19th century A.D. Private collection.

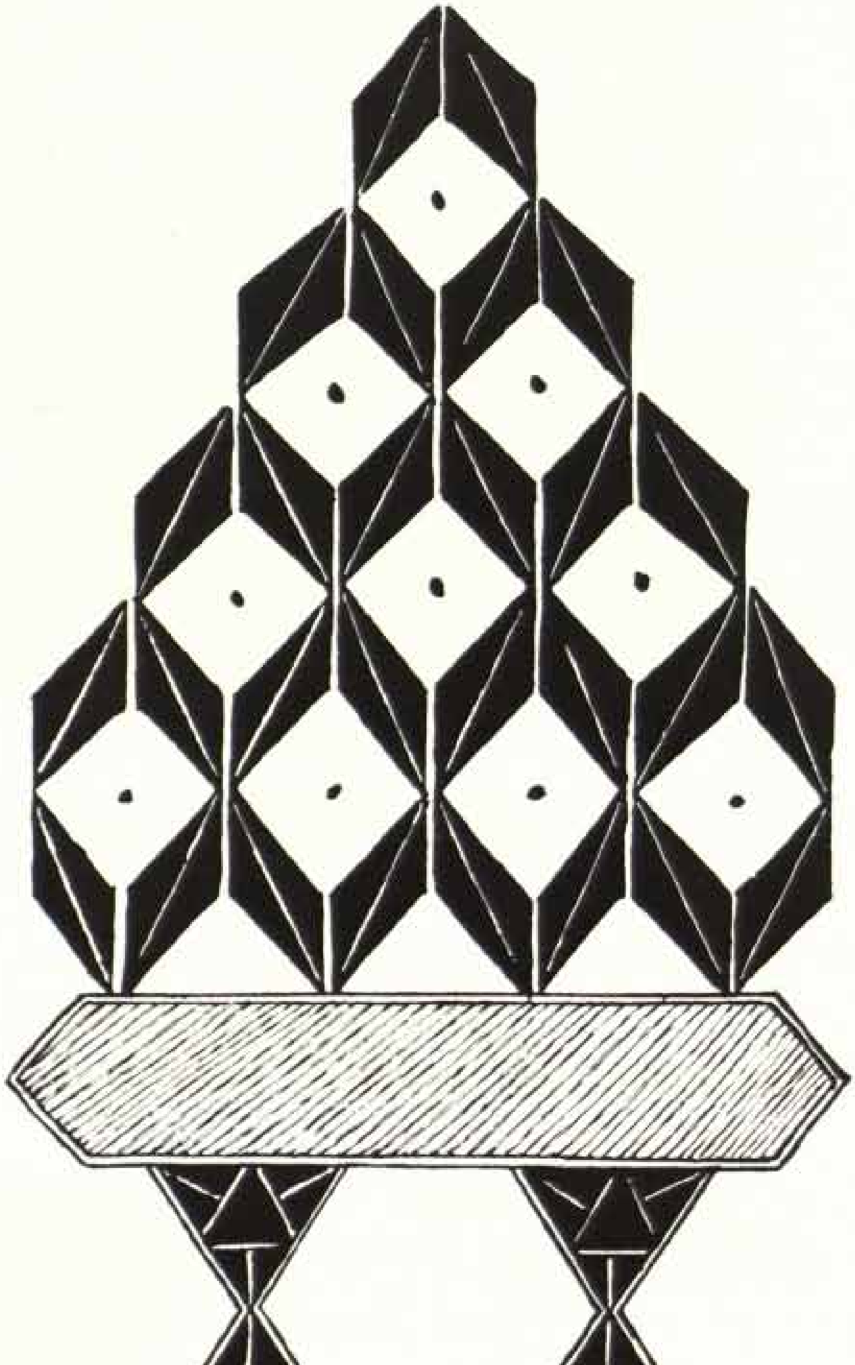


42

4

Thou art Bindu and the half-moon,
Whose substance is Hring and Phat.
Thou art mantra and the shelter of all.
Thy forms are threefold—
Gross, Subtle and Supreme.

Nila Tantra



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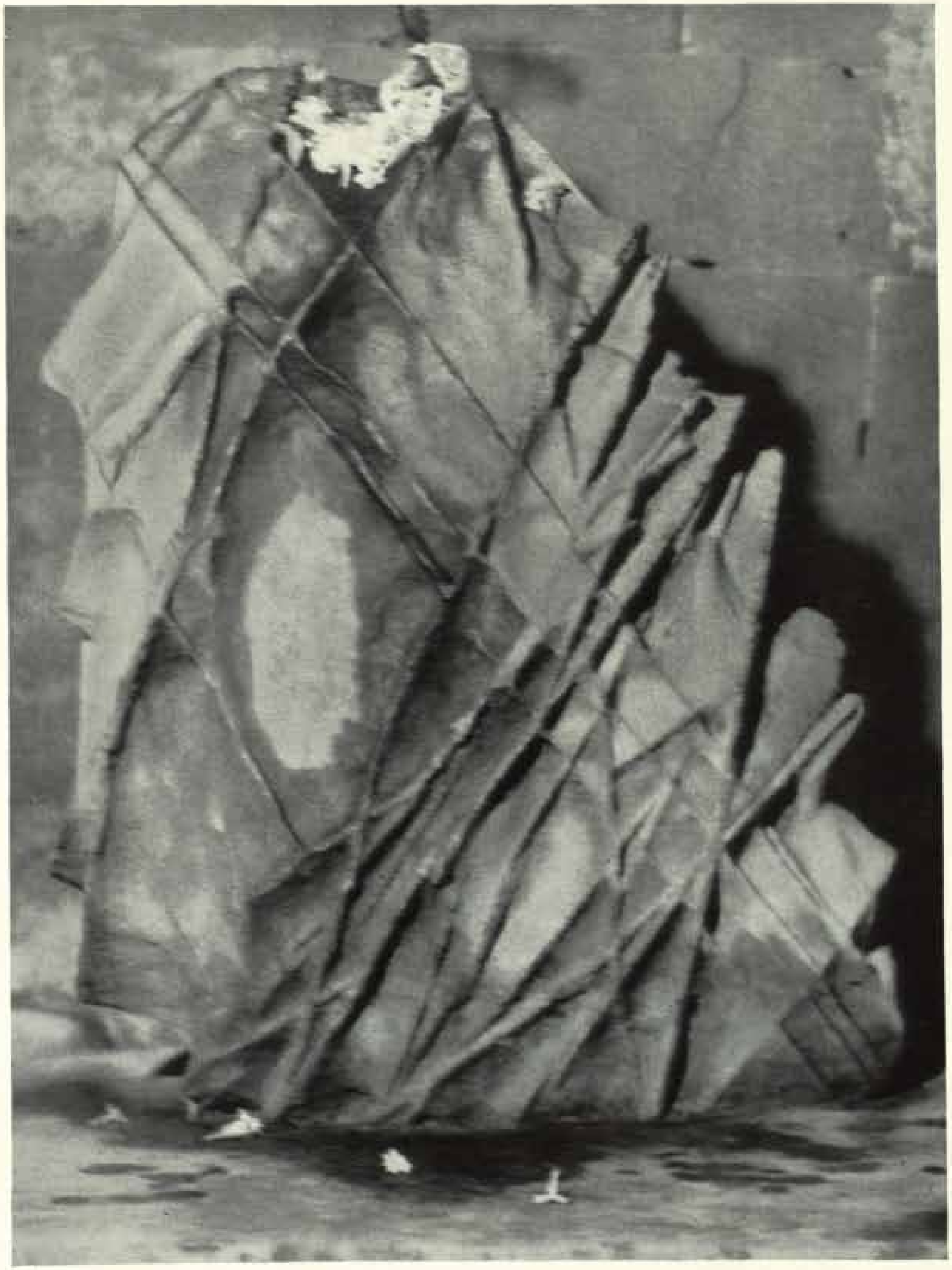

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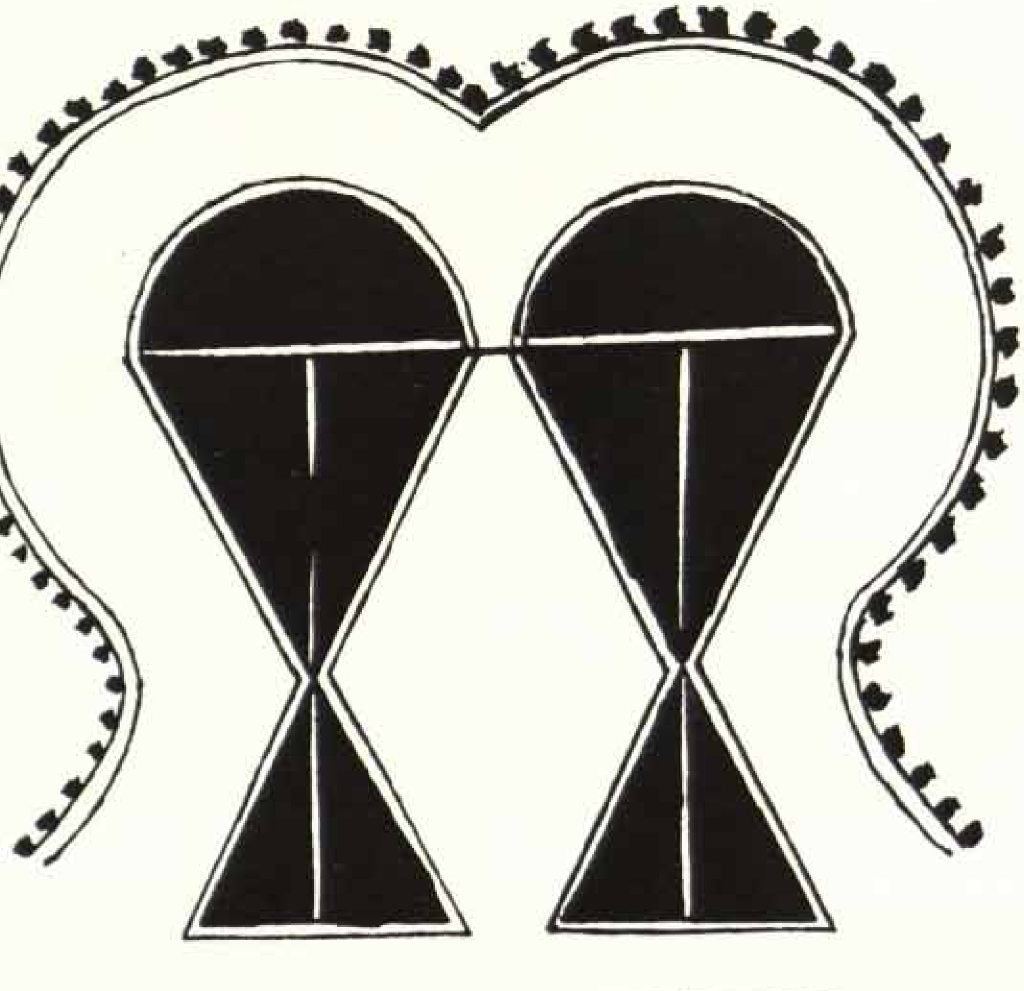

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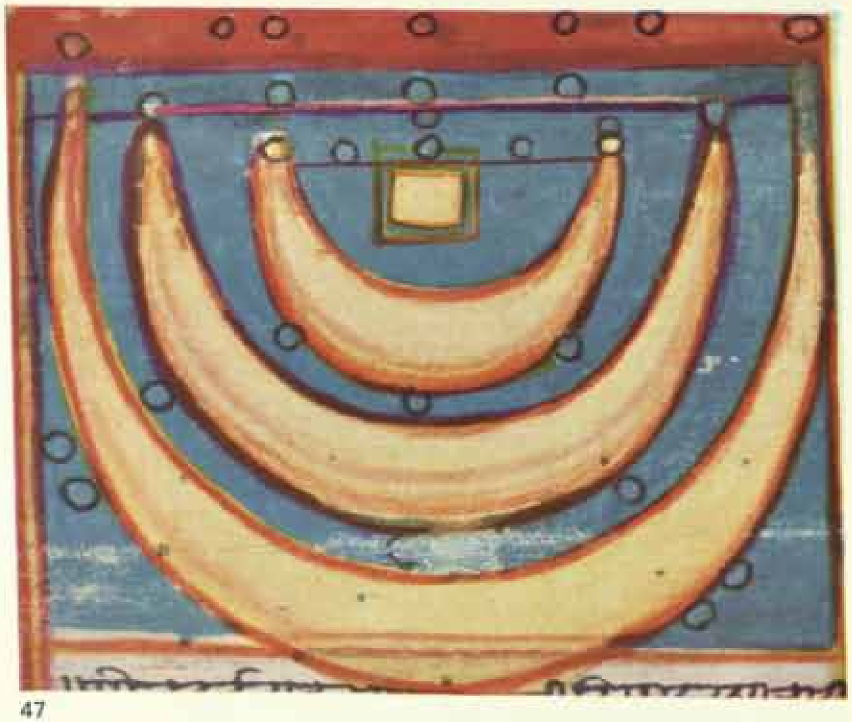

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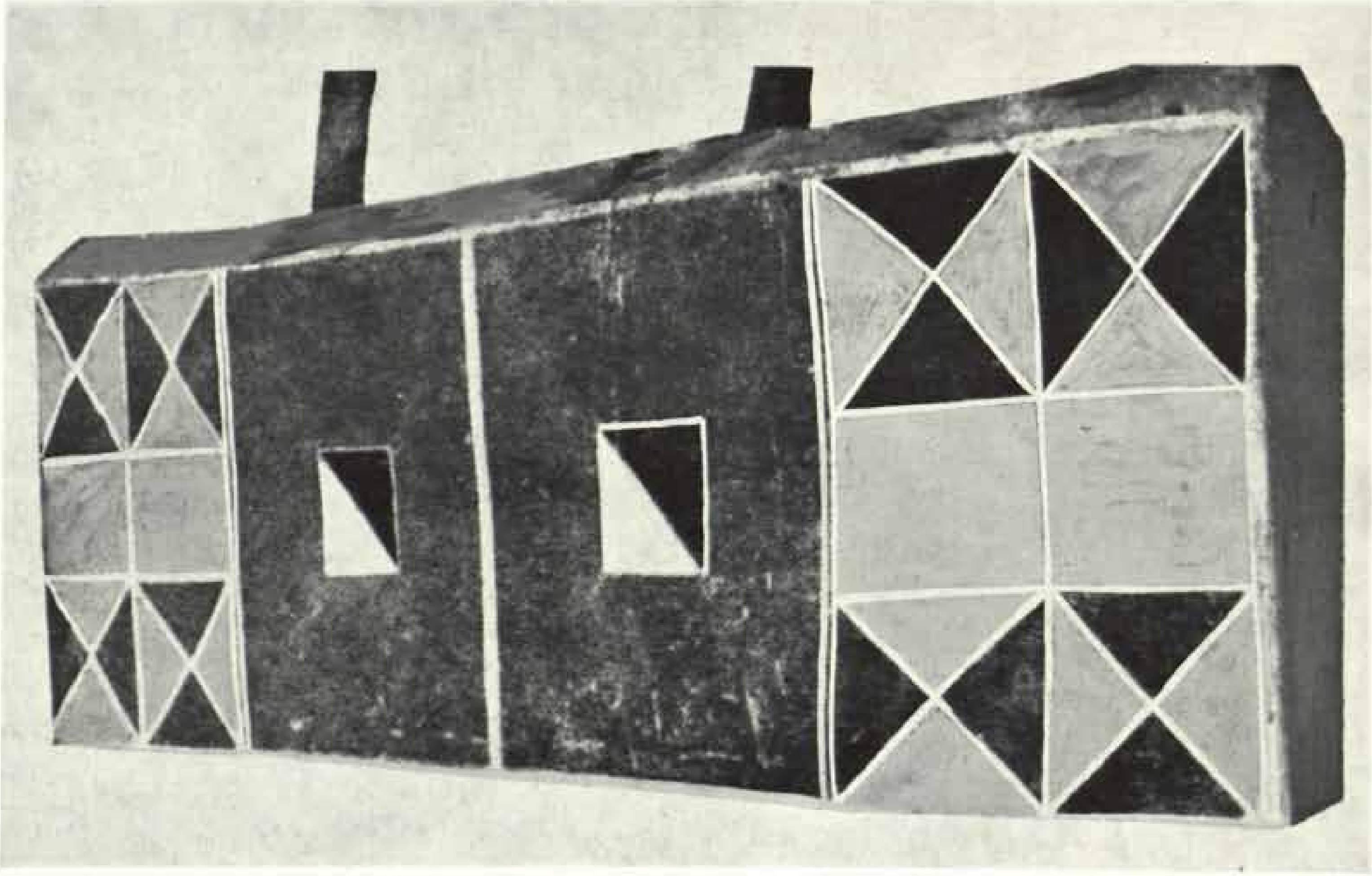

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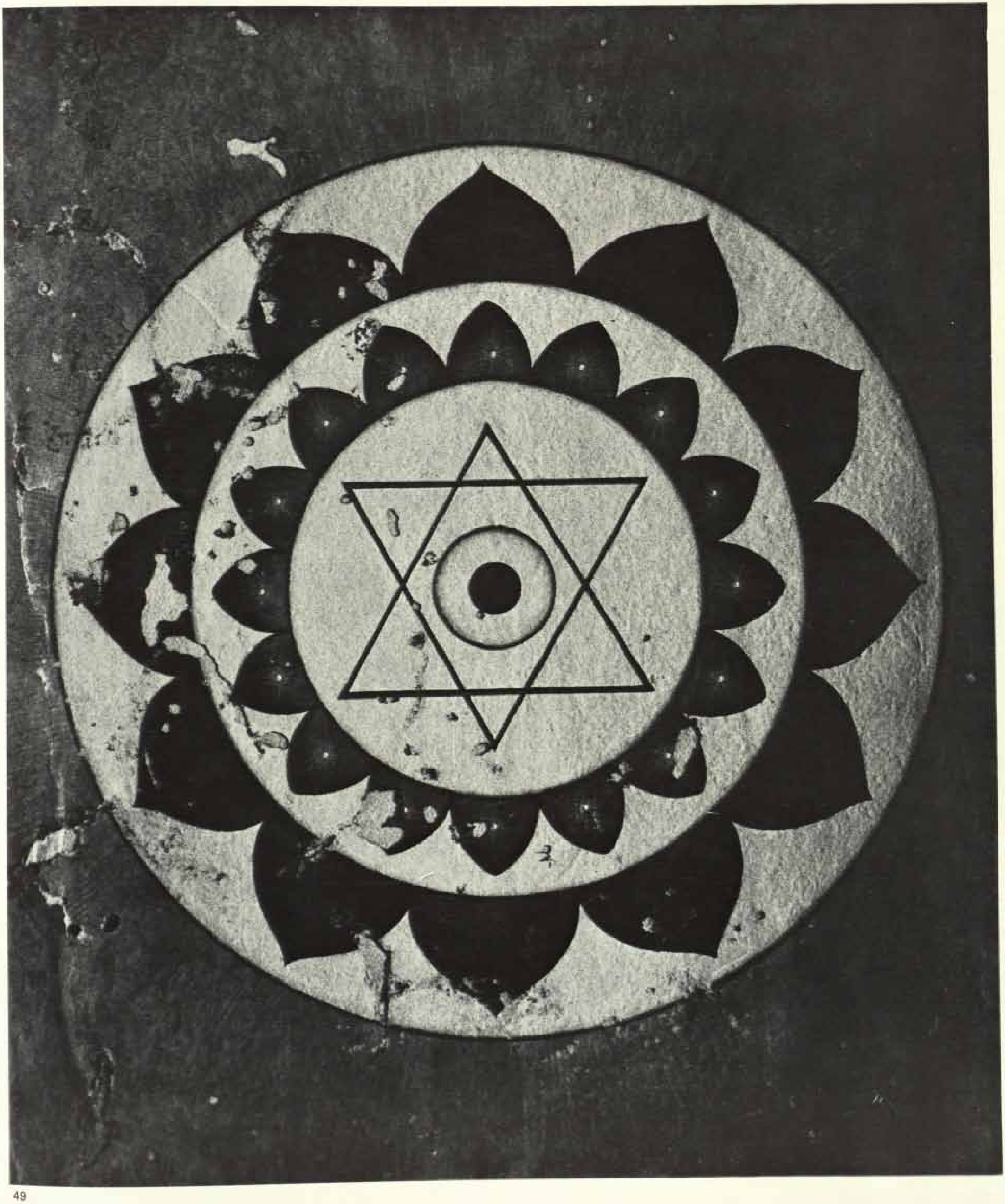

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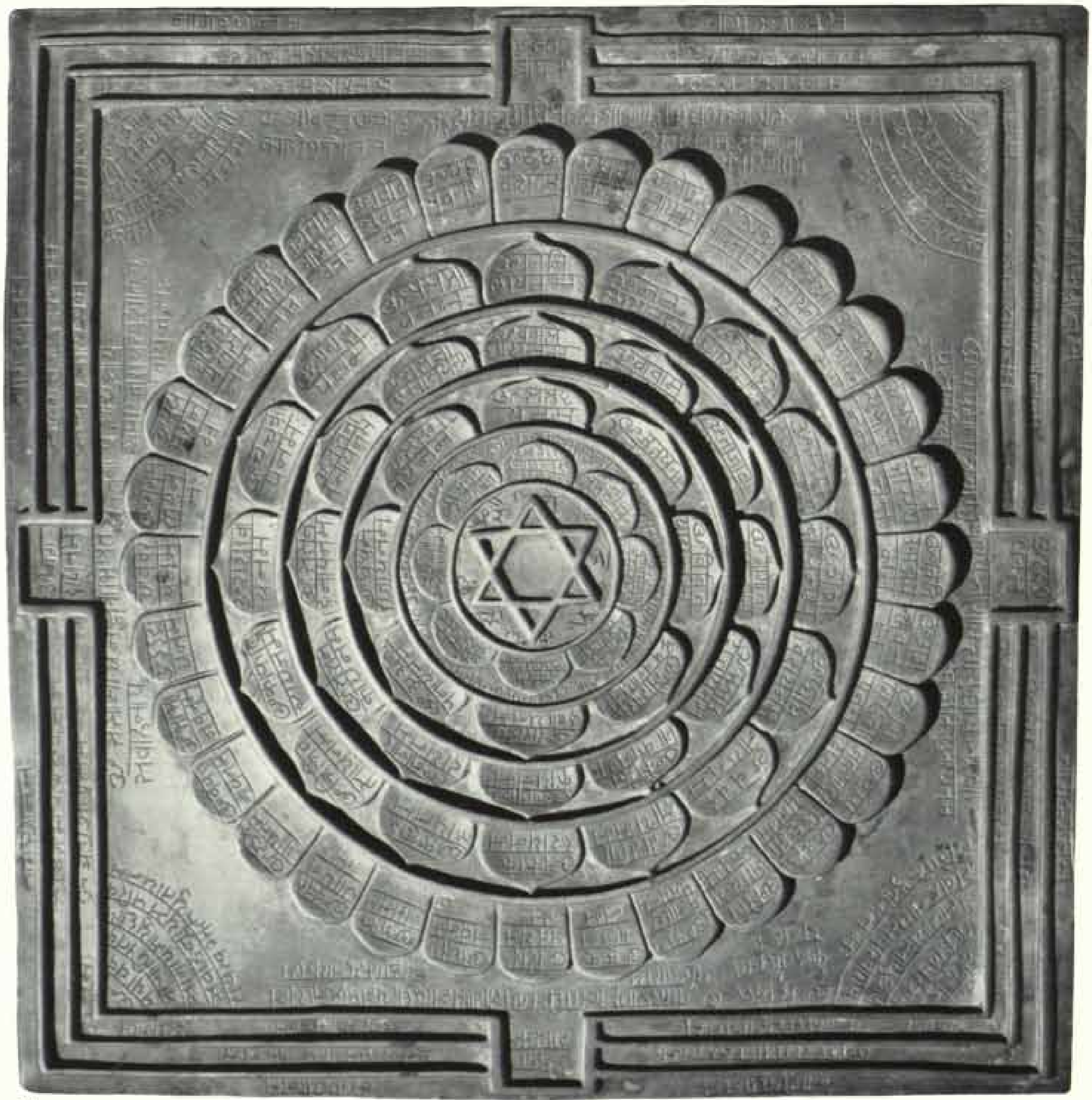

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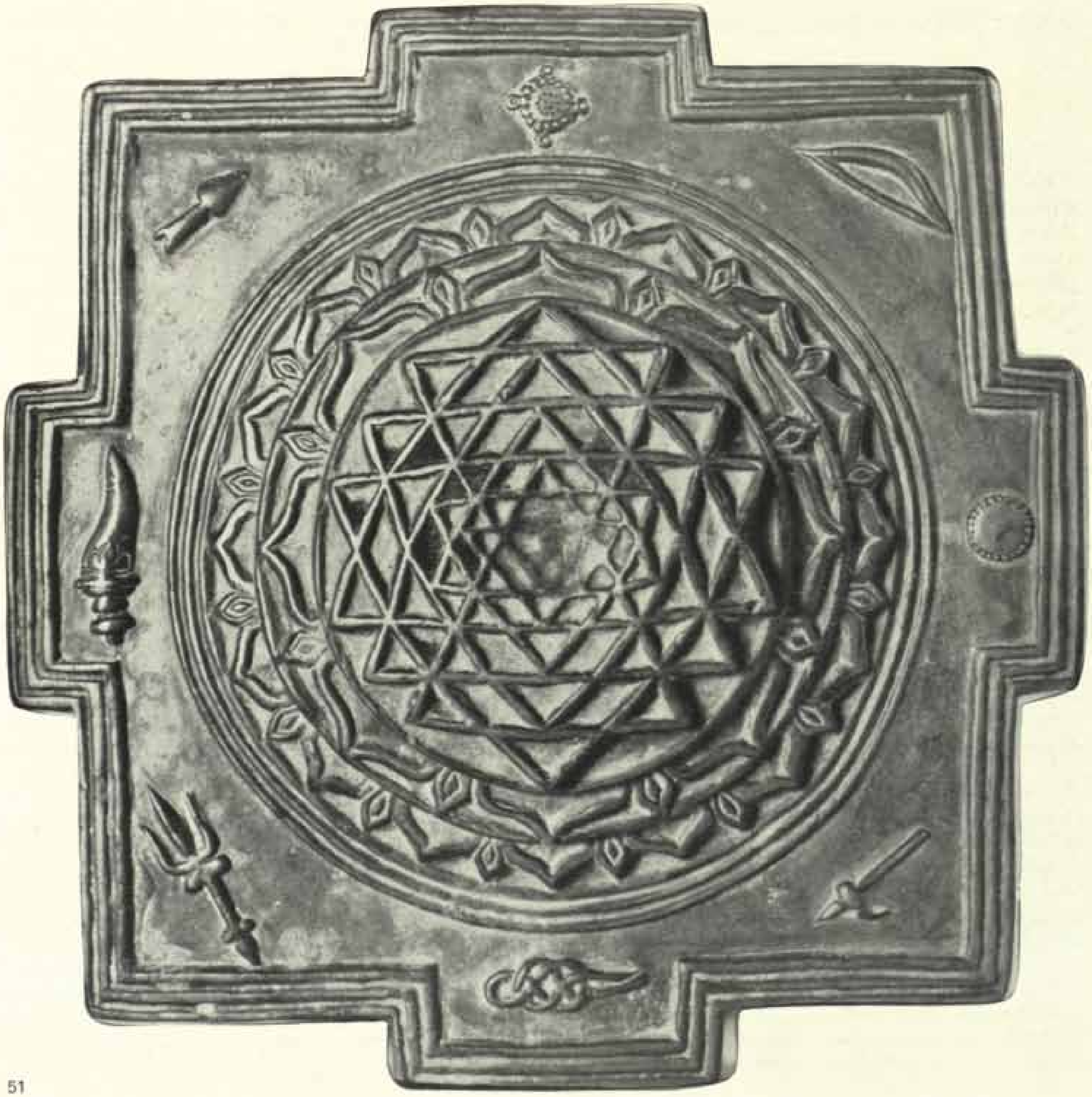


51

Description of plates, chapter 4

Plate 42
Goloka (sound and light). Painting. Rajasthan. c. 18th century A.D. Earth-globe with strata of nine fields. The nucleus is global, or oval in shape. All natural elements possessing solidity are global in their primordial states. In fact, it is the globeness of the universe which tends to make everything global. Private collection.

Plate 43
Kali Yantra. Drawing. Rajasthan. Contemporary expression of ageless traditional form. This type of *yantra*, commonly known as *paglya* (Sanskrit *pala*?) is a characteristic feature of *mandana* (Sanskrit mandala?) drawings. Various designs which are found in *mandanas* have a Tantric aspect; and a close study of these drawings reveals associations with *yantras*. Photograph: Archaeological Survey of India.

Plate 44
Devi Chamunda. Stone. Chamunda temple, Basohli. Jammu-Kashmir. c. 16th century A.D. In this abstract symbol of Devi, what is important is that all the *laya* (absorption) points are themselves incessantly in motion. Only in motion, can they endure as points, forces or forms; only then can they generate their basic rhythms—these movements of linear vital energies that sustain them as forms. Photograph: Archaeological Survey of India.

Plate 45
Damaru Yantra. Drawings. Rajasthan. Contemporary expression of ageless traditional form. This diagram tries to express primordial vibrations, or *spandas*, the "cosmic drum of sound", which by their lines of sound-energy create a dual "magnetic field". Here vibrations are slowed down at *laya* (absorption) points. Photograph: Archaeological Survey of India.

Plate 46
Manas-Chakra. Painting on cloth. Rajasthan. 1769 A.D. There are eight divisions of mind. *Manas*, or mind, is atomic in nature, has motion and velocity (*vega*), but no elements (*bhautika*). It cognizes objects instantaneously. It acts on all objects with equal force. Private collection.

Plate 47
Ardhachandrakara koti-chakra or chakra in the form of the crescent of the moon. Painting on cloth. Rajasthan. 1769 A.D. Symbol of *nada* (sound). Some consider that like other kinds of *paramanus*, there are atoms of sound also. These, because of their various inherent capacities, can produce sound-forms. Private collection.

Plate 48
Mantra. Painting on wall. Santal Parganas (Bihar). The mantra diagrams, particularly of the Santal adivasis, display an intimate phase of the highly abstract tantric art. Photograph: W.G.Archer.

Plate 49
Yantra. Painting. Rajasthan. c. 18th century A.D. Private collection.

Plate 50
Rama Yantra. Copper plate. South India. c. 17th–18th century A.D. *Mantras* have been grouped in a particular order to reveal a particular pattern of thought forms. Hidden in them are secret guides for unfolding the visionary image. Private collection.

Plate 51
Sri Yantra. Copper plate. South India. 17th–18th century A.D. Sri Yantra repeats the form of the double triangle enclosed in a lotus within four walls. It is the symbol of Devi in two forms. Her own form (*svarupa*) and the form of the universe (*visvarupa*). This *yantra* is composed of two sets of triangles and *chakras*, one within the other, centred upon the *bindu*. The four triangles with points upwards represent the Siva element, and the five pointing downwards, the Sakti element. All are formed by the *mula-prakriti* (root-sakti) and the *vikritis* (manifestations) which, because of their creative power, are Prakriti. The nine chakras also represent *sristi* (creation), *sthiti* (maintenance) and *samhara* (dissolution), each set of three being formed of the combinations: *sristi-sristi, sristi-sthiti, sristi-samhara; sthiti-sristi, sthiti-sthiti, sthiti-samhara; samhara-sristi, samhara-sthiti, samhara-samhara*. The ultimate object of meditation on this *yantra* is to realize the unit of *jivatman* (the meditator's individual soul) with the *Devi*. Practice of the ritual transforms the mind itself, and what at first seems merely an external *yantra*, with lines, corners and petals, becomes a pure mental state in the *sadhaka* himself. He, too, is a Sri Yantra, and he realizes himself as such. Private collection.

52

5

"What is here, is elsewhere.
What is not here, is nowhere."

Vishvasara Tantra

If, O Lord, Thou thinkest me capable of seeing it, then, O Lord of Yogis, show me Thy immutable Self.

The Blessed Lord said: Behold, O son of Pritha, by hundreds and thousands, My different forms celestial, of various colours and shapes.

See now, O Gudakesha, in this My body, the whole universe centred in one,—including the moving and the unmoving,—and all else that thou desirest to see.

But thou canst not see Me with these eyes of thine; I give thee supersensuous sight; behold My Yoga Power Supreme.

There in the body of the God of gods, the son of Pandu then saw the whole universe resting in one, with its manifold divisions.

Then Dhananjaya, filled with wonder, with his hair standing on end, bending down his head to the Deva in adoration, spoke with joined palms.

Arjuna said: I see all the Devas, O Deva, in Thy body, and hosts of all grades of beings; Brahma, the Lord, seated on the lotus, and all the Rishis and celestial serpents.

I see Thee of boundless form on every side with manifold arms, stomachs, mouths and eyes; neither the end nor the middle, nor also the beginning of Thee do I see, O Lord of the universe, O Universal Form.

I see Thee with diadem, club, and discuss; a mass radiance shining everywhere, very hard to look at, all around blazing like burning fire and sun, and immeasurable.

Thou art the Imperishable, the Supreme Being, the one thing to be known. Thou art the great Refuge of this Universe; Thou art the undying Guardian of the Eternal Dharma, Thou art the Ancient Purusa, I ween.

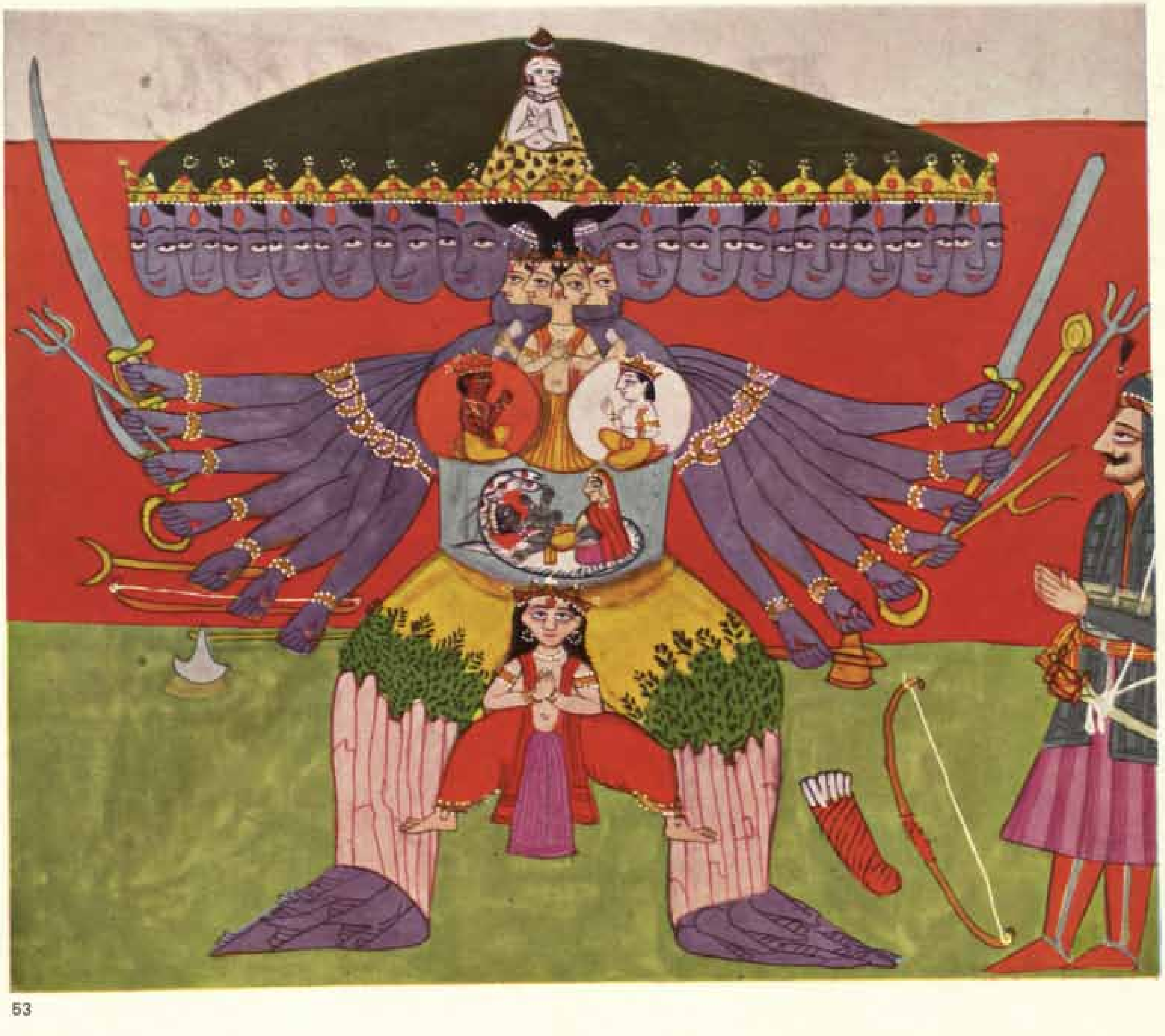
I see Thee without beginning, middle or end, infinite in power, of manifold arms; the sun and the moon Thine eyes, the burning fire Thy mouth; heating the whole universe with Thy radiance.

Having seen Thy immeasurable Form—with many mouths and eyes, O mighty-armed, with many stomachs, and fearful with many tusks,—the worlds are terrified, and so am I.

On seeing Thee touching the sky, shining in many a colour, with mouths wide open, with large fiery eyes, I am terrified at heart, and find no courage nor peace, O Vishnu.

Having seen Thy mouths, fearful with tusks, (blazing) like Pralaya-fires, I know not the four quarters, nor do I find peace; have mercy, O Lord of the Devas, O Abode of the universe.

Vision of the Universal Form GITA, Chap. 11 बिश्वरूपदर्शनं



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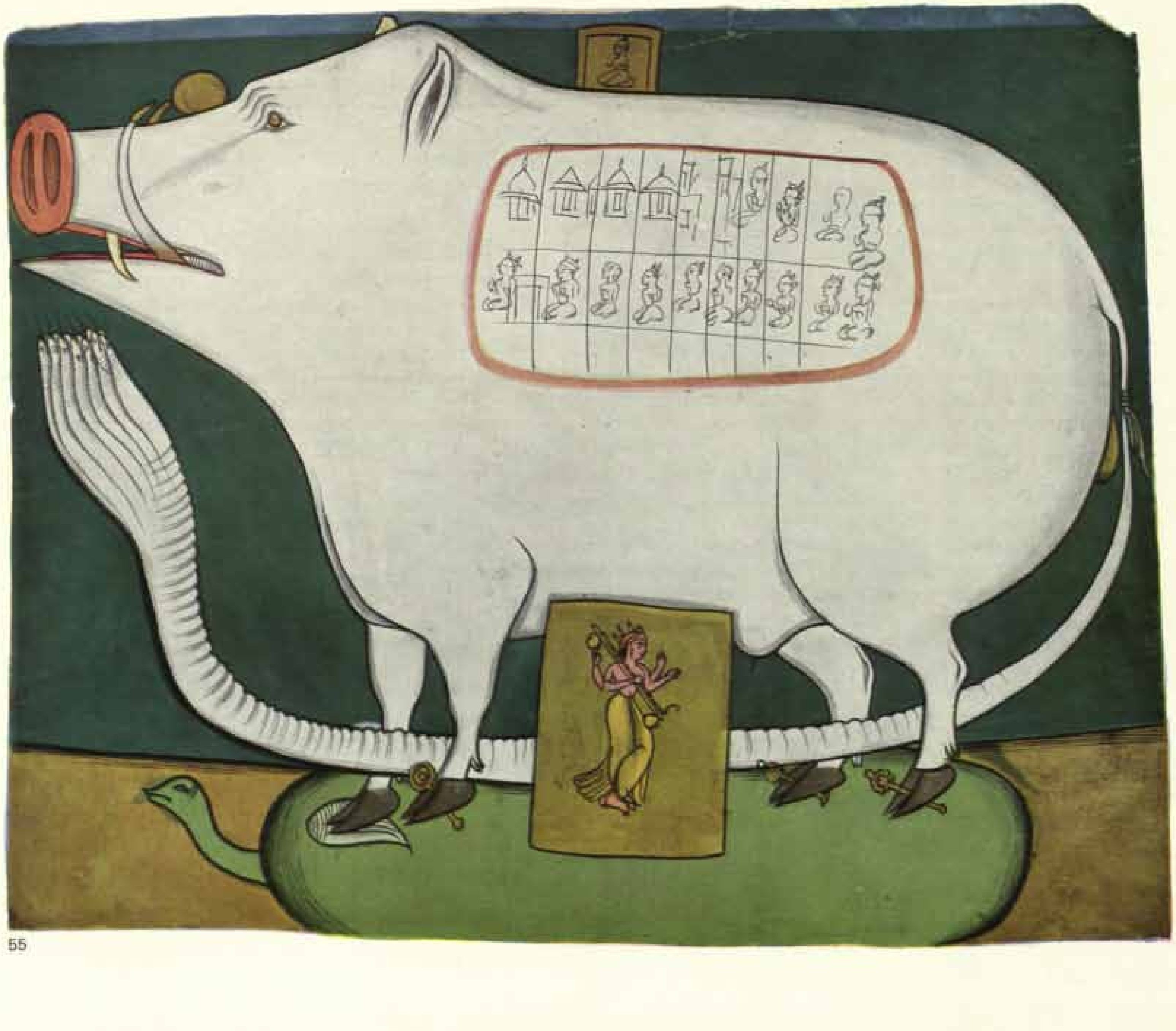


55

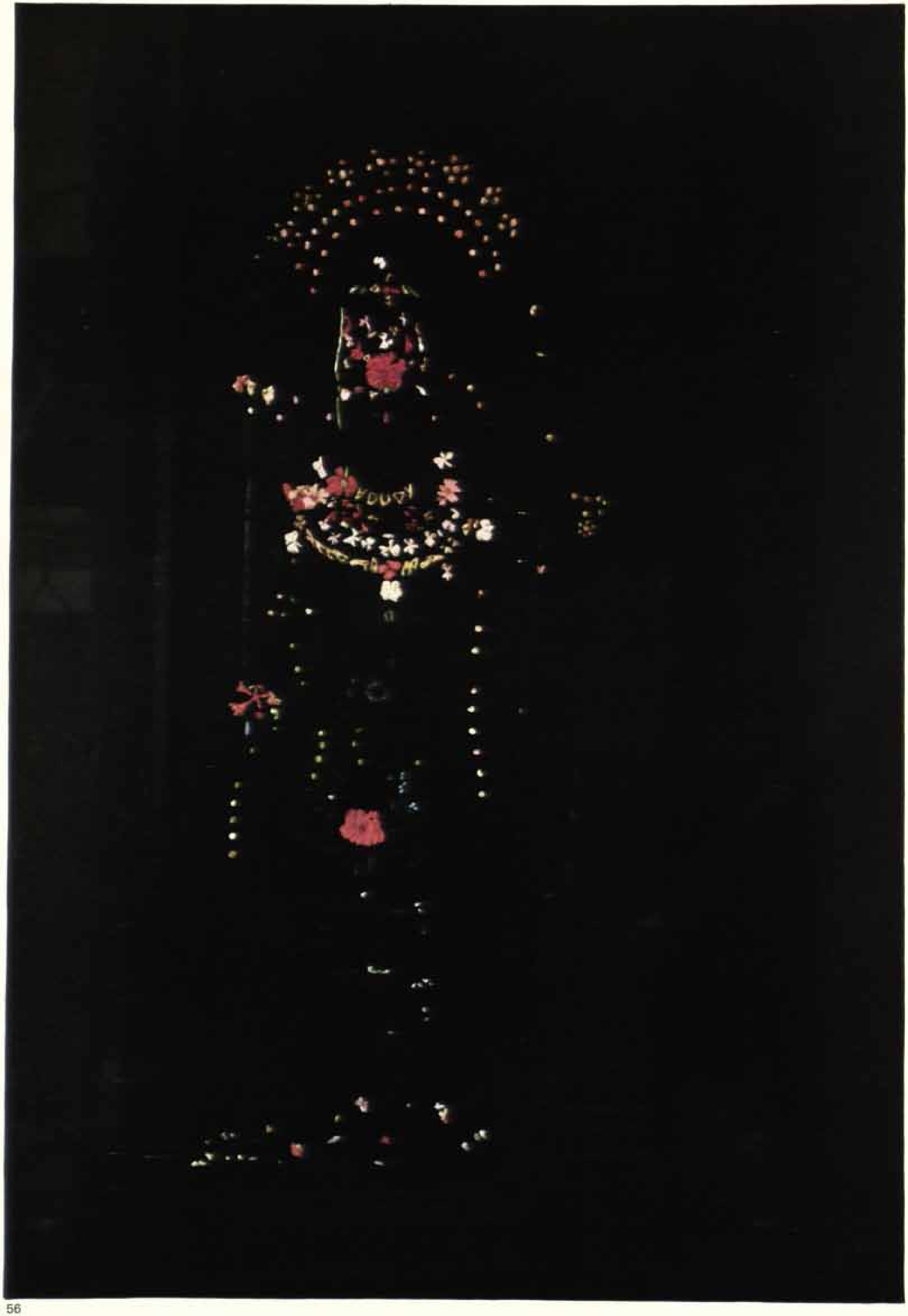
Description of plates, chapter 5

Plate 52
Chandrakalanalam Cakra. Painting. Rajasthan. c. 18th century A.D. The governing pattern of the ascending and descending forces and the coordinating centres, corresponding to different planes and dimensions, are the general characteristics of this *cakra* (*Kalagni-cakra?*). Private collection.

Plate 53
Visvarupadarshanam. Painting. Rajasthan. Early 19th century A.D. Arjuna's vision of the Universal Form—hundreds upon thousands of units, various in kind, colour and shape in it made One. There is no limit to Krishna's manifestations, for as he says, "I am the beginning, the life-span and the end." From the indivisible unity of all forms to the whole universe in its manifold forms, no part of nature can exist independently of the rest. An unbroken chain stretches from the lowest to the highest. At the end of the existing *kalpa* (cycle) they will all become One again. So Arjuna is shown the Universal Form of the Formless, in which powers of light and of darkness, of creation and dissolution, manifest themselves equally in all their elemental power. The background colours symbolize *sattva*, *rajas* and *tamas*. *Sattva* (essence) is the ascending or centripetal tendency. Expressed as a cohesive force and directed towards unity, virtue and liberation, this tendency is symbolized by the colour white. Red stands for *rajas* (energy), the circular movement of which gives impetus to all creative force. *Tamas* (mass or inertia) is the descending or centrifugal tendency, the force which cause decomposition and annihilation, but also detachment and liberation. It is, here, dark green, but is generally represented by black or midnight blue. The colours result from the potencies inherent within the particular arrangement of essence, energy and mass. Private collection.

Plate 54
Dash-avatara or the ten incarnations (detail). Painting. Deccani school. 18th–early 19th century A.D. A page from the illuminated manuscript *Omkara Apara Brahma Niranjana Jyoti-svarupa Paramatma Akalamuratam Jagatprakasa* by Shyamananda, written in Arabic script. The ten incarnations of Vishnu explain the various stages of evolution, their order being: fish, tortoise, boar, half-man and half-lion, dwarfman, the militant Parashurama, the moral Rāma, the cultivator (haladhara) Balarama, the enlightened one, the Lord Buddha and finally, Kalki arriving on horseback.
Human life made its appearance about one and half million years ago; it then passed through various stages up to the Palaeolithic period. In India it has always been held that no gulf exists between the various forms of existence; for instance, the difference between man and animal is not one of kind but of degree. God manifests himself in various forms and in various ways, sometimes sublime, sometimes terrifying nevertheless he manifests himself in all men, animals, and objects, even though partially or in infinitely small measure. Private collection.

Plate 55
Varaha-avatara. Painting. Rajasthan. Late 18th–early 19th century A.D. In his third incarnation, Vishnu manifested himself as a boar, in order to rescue the earth submerged under the ocean of non-existence. The serpent power represents the latent energy of the waters. Private collection.



6

Primordial one.
Three-eyed.
Holder of the spear
Spouse of Him who holds the Pinaka Bow.
Wonderful one.
Whose bell sounds fearfully.
Of great austerities.
Manas.
Buddhi.
Ahangkara.
In the form of chitta.
Funeral Pyre.
Knowledge.
Whose substance is all mantras.
Reality.
Whose nature is the true bliss.
Endless one.

Vishvasara Tantra

57

58

Pure one.

Essence of all.

Knowledge.

Action.

The Supreme one.

Giver of *buddhi*.

Who art all.

Whose love is unbounded

Existence.

Holder of many weapons.

Virgin.

Maiden.

Youthful.

Ascetic one.

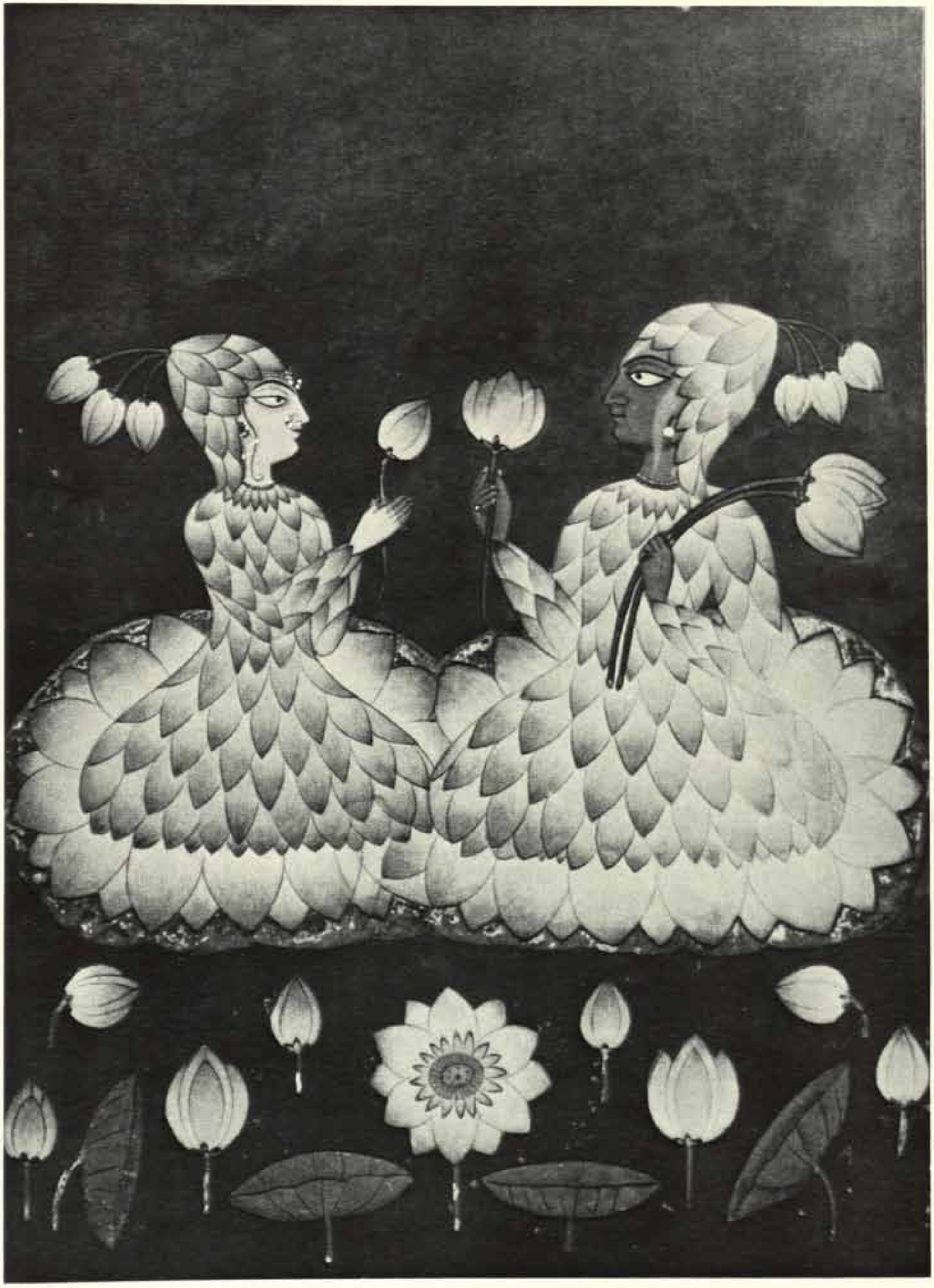
Old mother.

Giver of strength

Durgashatanamastotra.

61

62



63

Description of plates, chapter 6

Plate 56
Siva with garlands of flowers. Stone. Perur temple at Coimbatore. c. 17th century A.D. In the *garbhagriha* (womb-chamber) of the Perur temple a *sadhaka* bedecks the image each night with flowers at the time of *sringara* (dressing), a ritual symbolizing the universe, as composed of light and colours. This recalls the symbolism of the garland of letters, or *varnamala*, which enable the *sadhaka* to unite with his *sadhana-sakti*. The consciousness, which is the *devata*, is then realized, and in this sense appears to the *sadhaka*. This is the qualified (*saguna*) form of the *devata;* the other is the subtle (*suksma*) form, which appears as "light" (*jyotirmaya*). Photograph: Oppi Untract.

Plate 57
Adya-Sakti. Stone. Alampur Museum. Hyderabad. c. 11th century A.D. The Ultimate Ground. The manifested world is traced back to an unmanifested ground, Prakriti, which is conceived as formless, undifferentiated, without beginning and without end. The transcendental influence of Prakriti initiates the process of creation, thus awakening the cosmic force. Moving from instability to equilibrium, these forces evolve and transform energy until they dissolve the universe into its original unmanifested ground, the unknowable Prakriti. Photograph: Archaeological Survey of India.

Plate 58
Svayambhunatha. Painting on cloth. Nepal. 17th century A.D. The Self-Born Lord. Private collection.

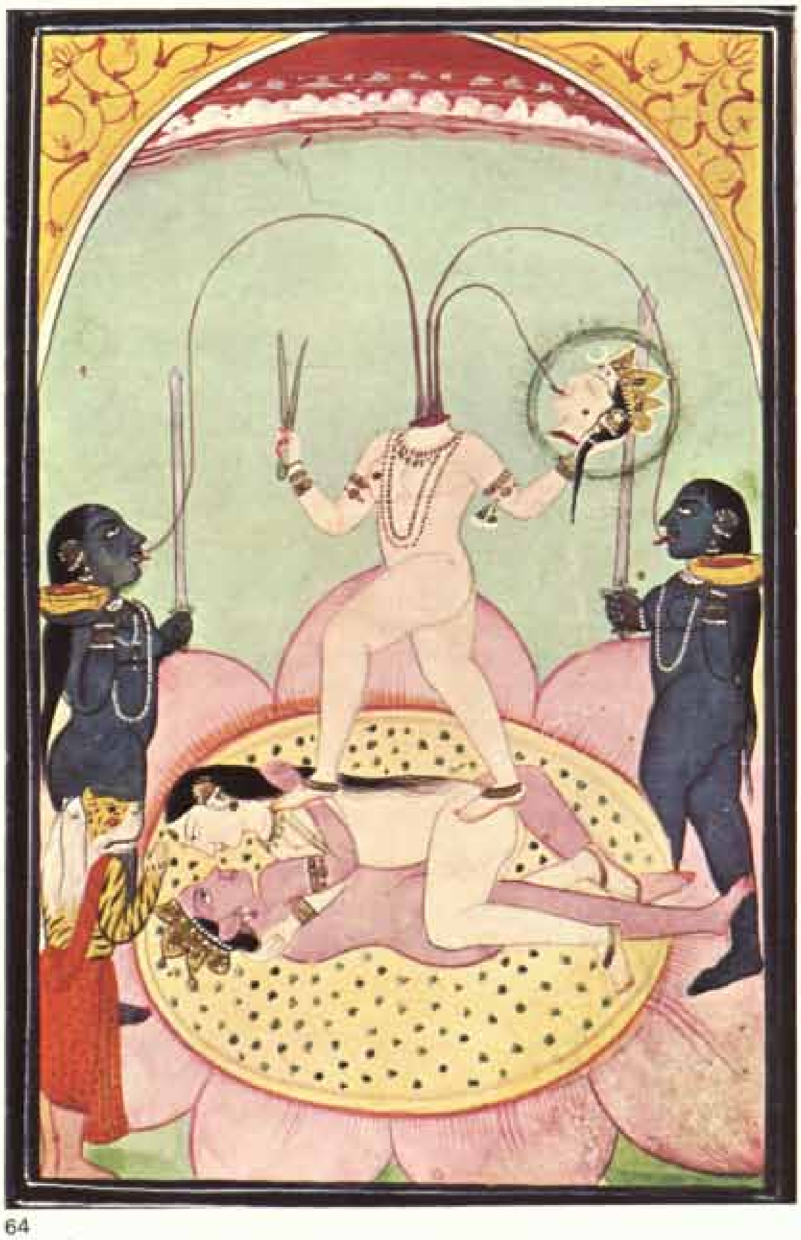
Plate 59
Devi as Durga. Stone. Mangaldoi, Assam. c. 16th–17th century A.D. Gauhati Museum.

Plate 60
Sarvabuddha Dakini. Bronze. Nepal. c. 18th century A.D. The Dakinis are feminine divinites. The *dhyana* of Vajravarahi, a special form, prescribes: "The worshipper should think himself as goddess Vajravarahi whose colour is red like the pomegranate flower and is two-armed. She exhibits in her right hand the *Vajra* along with the raised index finger, and shows in the left the *Kapala* and the *Khatvanga*. She is one-faced and three-eyed, has disshevelled hair, is marked with the six auspicious symbols and is nude. She is the essence of five kinds of knowledge and is the embodiment of the *Sahaja* pleasure. She stands in the *Pratyalidha* attitude, tramples upon the gods Bhairava and Kalaratri, wears a garland of heads still wet with blood which she drinks." The garland of heads, a symbol of elemental forces, combines to produce that multitude which she destroys and again creates, the skull in her hand being the seed-receptacle of the universe. Private collection.

Plate 61
Pancha-tattvas (the five elements). Painting. Nepal. c. 18th century A.D. Shri-patra is the cup or container of the unseen, and of the seeds of life. Cosmic evolution is a two-fold process, creative as well as destructive, dissimilative as well as assimilative, katabolic as well as anabolic. Private collection.

Plate 62
Rama and Sita. Painting. Rajasthan. Late 18th century A.D. Conceived as Vishnu and Lakshmi in the *Suriya* or Sun-disk *mandala*. According to the *dhyana:* "*dhyeayas sada savitrimandala-madhyavarati narayana sarasijasanasamnivistah*". Purusha is the principle of consciousness which witnesses the world process generated by his Sakti, that is, Prakriti as the ground of manifestation. Bharat Kala Bhavan, Banaras.

Plate 63
Radha and Krishna. Painting. Basohli school. Early 18th century A.D. The lotus is a symbol of manifestation. Here Purusha is detached because of the knowledge: "She (*hladini sakti*) has been seen by me, and the other (Sakti or Prakriti) retires because of the knowledge 'I am seen'." And there is no longer the condition of creation even though the two exist side by side. This is the final realization. Bharat Kala Bhavan, Banaras.



64

7

"That Male (Purusha) and Myself are ever the same. There is no difference between Him and Me. The Purusha is what I am; I am what the Purusha is. Difference arises only from ignorance. He who is intelligent and is free from the bondage of world can know our subtle difference; there is no doubt about this. The one without a second, perennial Brahman becomes dual at the time of creation. As a single lamp becomes dual by difference of Upadhi (condition), as a single face becomes dual in the form of an image in a mirror, as a single body appears in dual form with its shadow, even so our images are many owing to the difference of minds (which are made up of Maya). O Aja (unborn), for the purpose of creation the difference arises at the time of creation. It is only the difference between the seen and the unseen. At the time of final dissolution I am neither male nor female or neuter."

Devibhagavata

65

66

71

Description of plates, chapter 7

Plate 64
Chhinnamasta. Painting. Kangra school. Late 18th century A.D. Nothing dies in the world; what is apparently dead returns to its elements, and then again is reconstituted into form. There is one unbroken, infinite process of life and change. An element may start in the sun, and ultimately enter a human being, an animal or a plant on earth; only the names and forms differ. The conjunction of opposites as Rati and Kama, the female and male deities of love, represents a transcending of the phenomenal world and an abolition of all experience of duality. Bharat Kala Bhavan, Banaras.

Plate 65
Ardhanarisvara. Stone. Banaras. Contemporary expression of ageless traditional form. Private collection.

Plate 66
Ardhanarisvara. Stone. Purapara, Bengal. c. 12th century A.D. The male and female attributes are shown as part of the same body, hermaphroditically joined, thus anticipating a much later discovery: the idea that masculinity and feminity are two different factors is as illusory as the duality of body and soul. If, in a male, his feminine aspect is not sufficiently developed and is repressed, he is not able to integrate it into his personality. The same is true of the woman and her masculine aspect. The erect penis signifies also that he is consubstantial with the penetrating essence of the universe. Interesting information about the basic unity of masculinity and feminity may be gathered from the Buddhist Tantric texts. Rajshahi Museum. Photograph: Archaeological Survey of India.

Plate 67
Hevajra. Bronze. Tibet. c. 17th century A.D. "The whole world", says the Hevajra-tantra, "is the nature of *sahaja*, for *sahaja* is the quintessence (*svarupa*) of all; this quintessence is *nirvana* to those who possess the perfectly pure *citta*." One "realizes" the state of *sahaja* by transcending the dualities; as a result the concepts of *advaya* (non-duality) and *yuganaddha* (principle of union) hold an important place in Buddhist Tantra. Private collection.

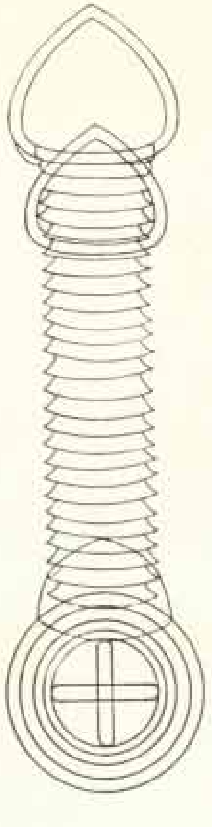
Plate 68
Adi Buddha and his Sakti in the attitude called Padmalinga-asana. Bronze. Nepal. c. 18th century A.D. As fire is ever connected with the capacity of burning, so this consciousness is ever associated with sakti. The two are inseparable; the Adi Buddha, the pure consciousness, is the silent seer of all experiences, while Sakti brings forth this universe, sustains it, and dissolves it. When the idea of both merges, the state of *ananda* or infinite joy and ecstasy is reached. Private collection.

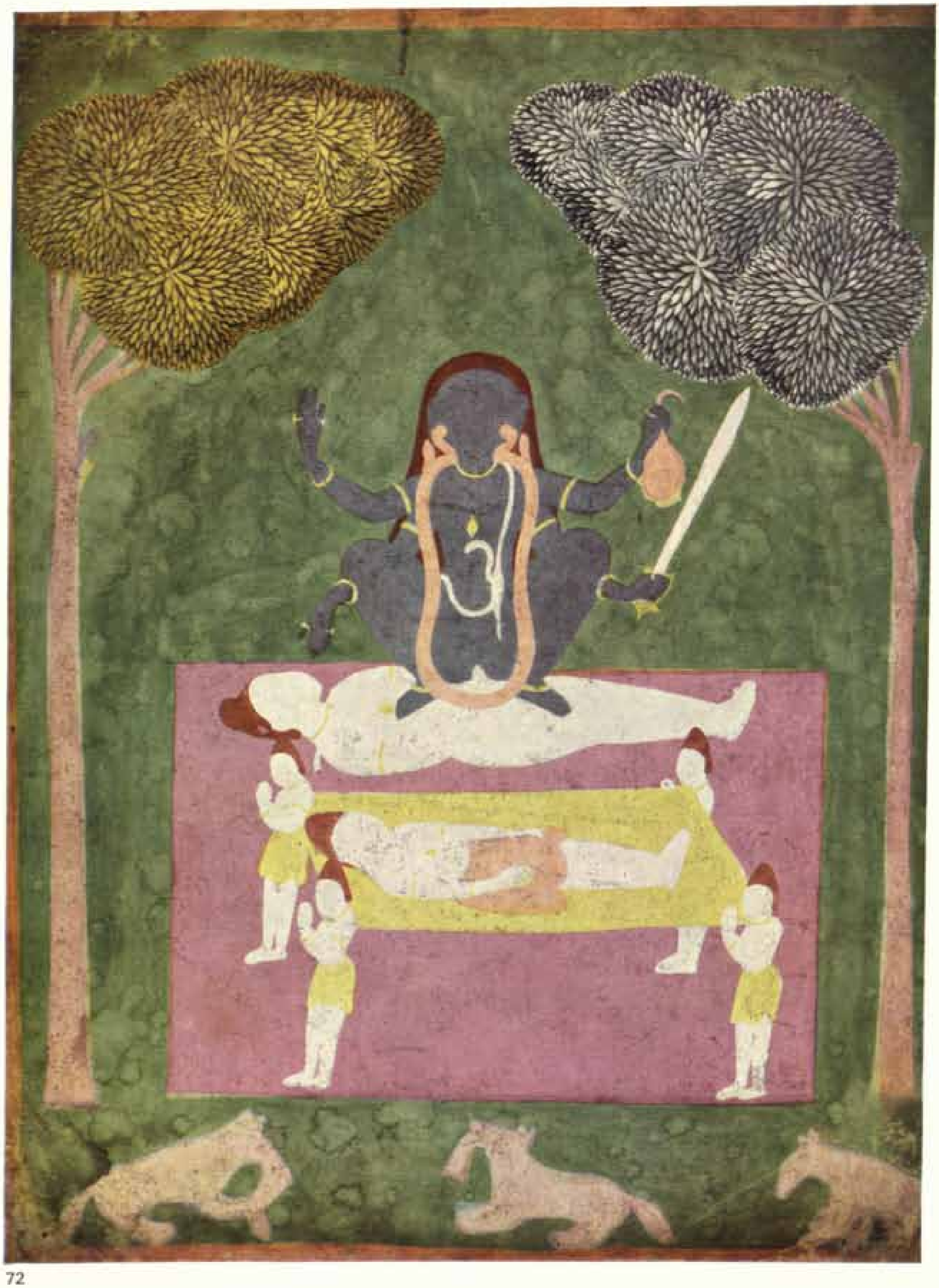
Plate 69
Rati-asana (detail). Stone. Khajuraho. Visvanatha temple. 1059–1087 A.D. *Asana* is a mode of transcending the human condition. *Asana* is the first concrete step taken for the purpose of abolishing the diversities of human existence. During the practice of *asana* the body often imitates some other condition than the human; for exemple, the yogini in a state of *asana* can correspond to a creeper (*lata*) or to a sacred statue. *Lata* is a Tantric term for a woman, embracing a man as the creeper enfolds a tree. There is an *asana* in which the *sadhaka* is embraced by his *sakti* in a particular way which is called *latasadhana*. Under no circumstances can he be likened to man qua man, who by nature is unrhythmic. On the plane of the body, *asana* is an *ekagrata*, a concentration on a single point. During this concentration the body is maintained in a single position. Just as *ekagrata* arrests the agitation of the mind, so *asana* terminates the mobility of the body by reducing the infinity of possible positions to a single archetypal, iconographic posture. Photograph: Archaeological Survey of India.

Plate 70
Yoni-asana. Stone. Konarak. Surya temple. 1238–1264 A.D. Mithuna appears as the consummation of a long and difficult apprenticeship. After perfect control of his senses, one must approach the "devout woman" by stages and transubstantiate her into a goddess. No one can engage in the rite if he is not spiritually and physically pure. In this state, every conjunction of opposites represents of transcending of the phenomenal world, an abolition of all experience of duality. Such reintegration is the creative act, achieved by the *urdhvareta* who restores the seed to its own place in the primordial Male-Female. The Ratnasara proclaims that he who realizes the "truth of the body" can then attain to the "truth of the universe." But in Tantrism, when man and woman are mentioned, it is not the "ordinary man" (*samanya manusa*), the "man of passions", who is meant but the essential, archetypal man, and "unborn" (*ayoni manusa*) and "unconditioned"; nor is it the "ordinary woman" (*samanya rati*), but the "extraordinary woman" who is the essence of Radha (*visesa rati*). Photograph: Archaeological Survey of India.

Plate 71
Padmasana. Stone. Kamakhya, Assam. c. 1600 A.D. The Kamakhya hill and temple near Gauhati is the ancient seat of Tantric learning and

practices. Keeping continuously to the practice, according to the Hevajra-Tantra, the yogin is instructed by the yoginis: "Take such and such a Mudra, O Vajradhrk, and serve the cause of living-beings." Taking this girl, who has wide-open eyes and is of age and endowed with youth and beauty, he should consecrate her with the seed of enlightenment. Beginning with the ten rules of virtuous conduct, he should expound to her the *Dharma*, how the mind is fixed on the divine form, on the meaning of symbolic forms and concerning onepointedness of mind, and in one month she will be fit, of that there is no doubt. And so the girl is there, now freed from all false notions, and received as though she were a boon. Or else he should produce a Mudra by conjuring her forth by his own power from amongst the gods or titans or men, or the *yaksas* or *kinnaras*. Then taking her, one should perform the practice with the realization of one's own composure. For this practice, which is called terrifying in appearance, is not taught for the sake of enjoyment, but for the examination of one's own thought, whether the mind is steady or waving. (D.L. Snellgrove: The Hevajra-Tantra, pp. 90–91.) Gauhati Museum.

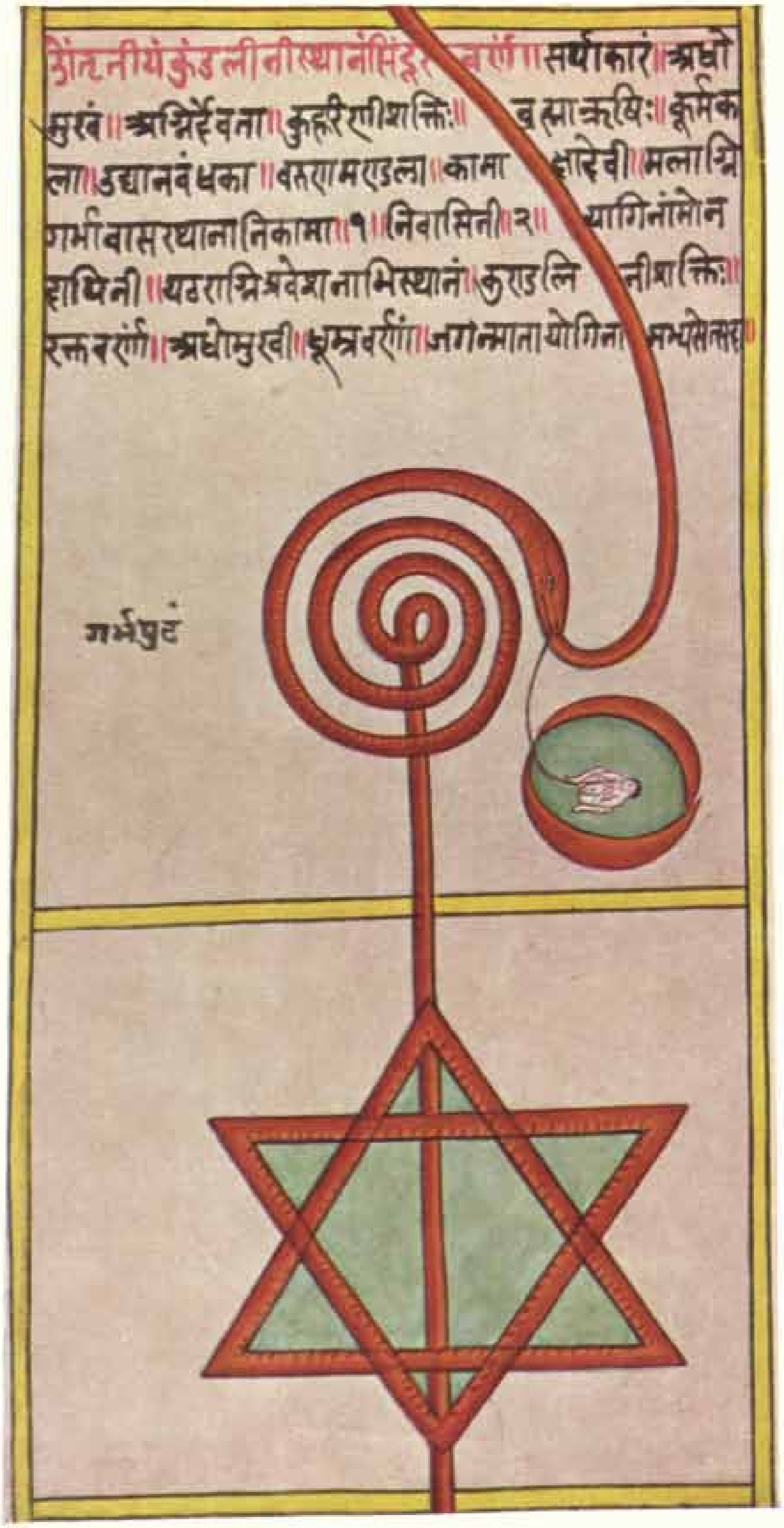




72

8

"Who am I?" "Whence have I come?"
"Where am I going?" Tantra says:
I am all this.



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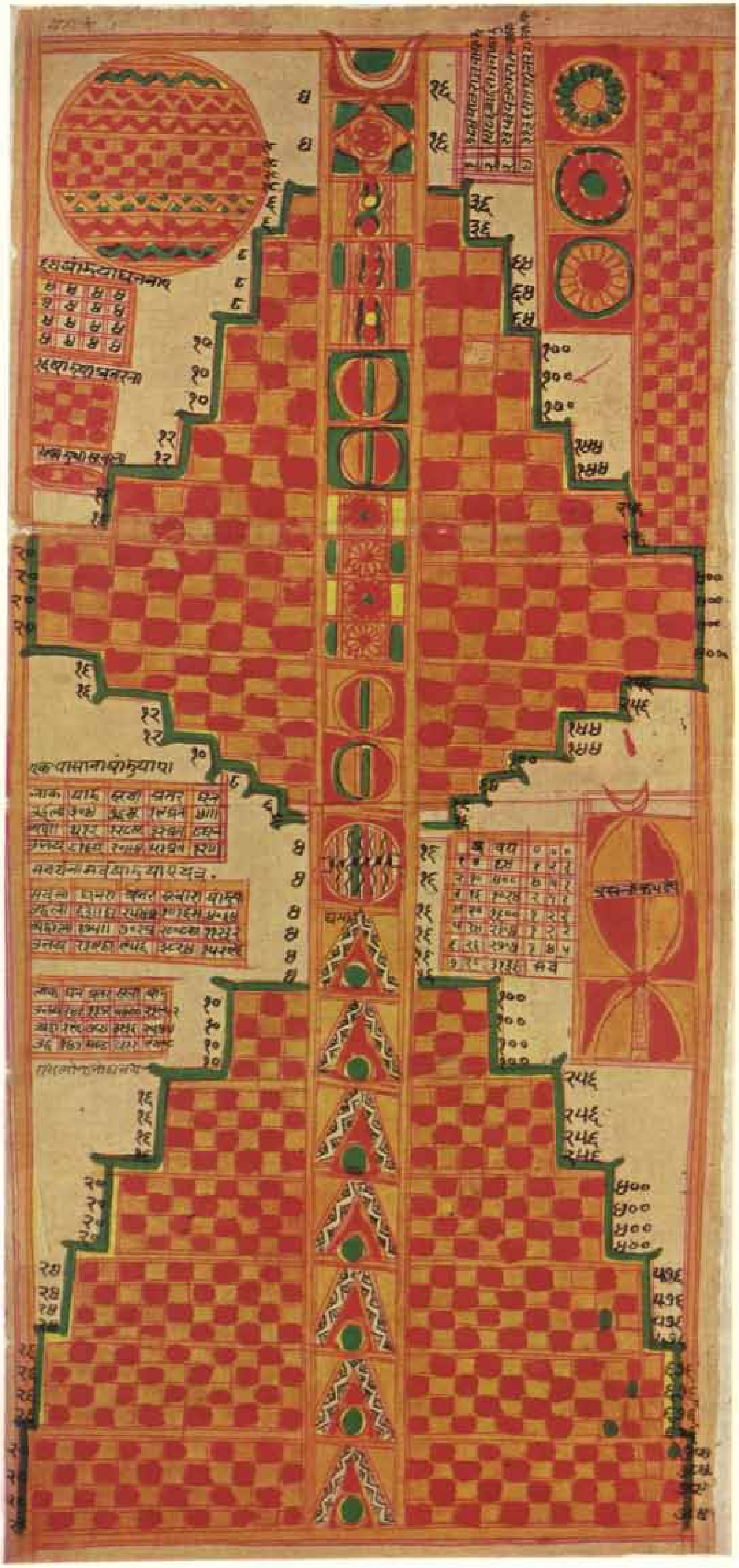

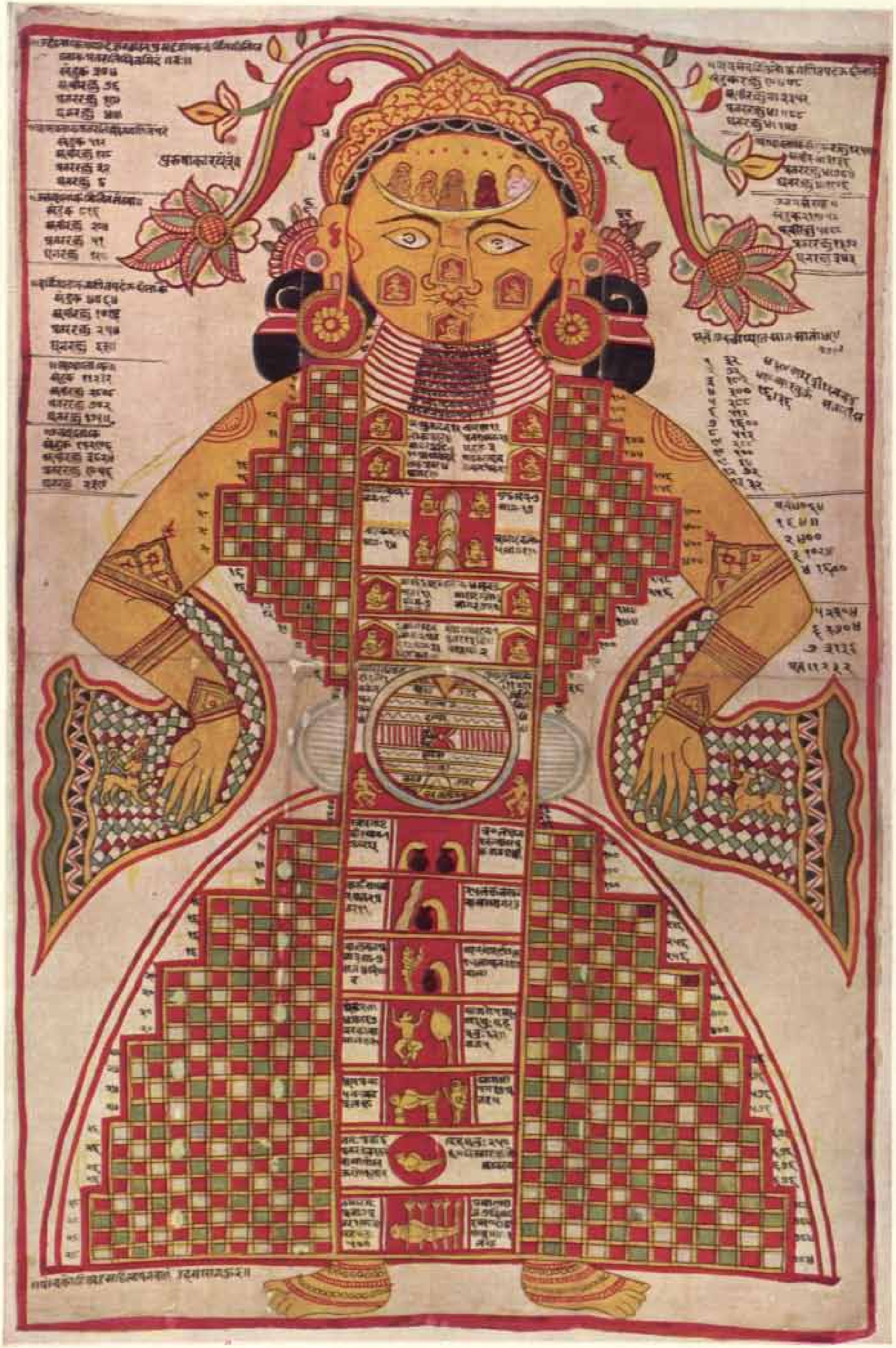

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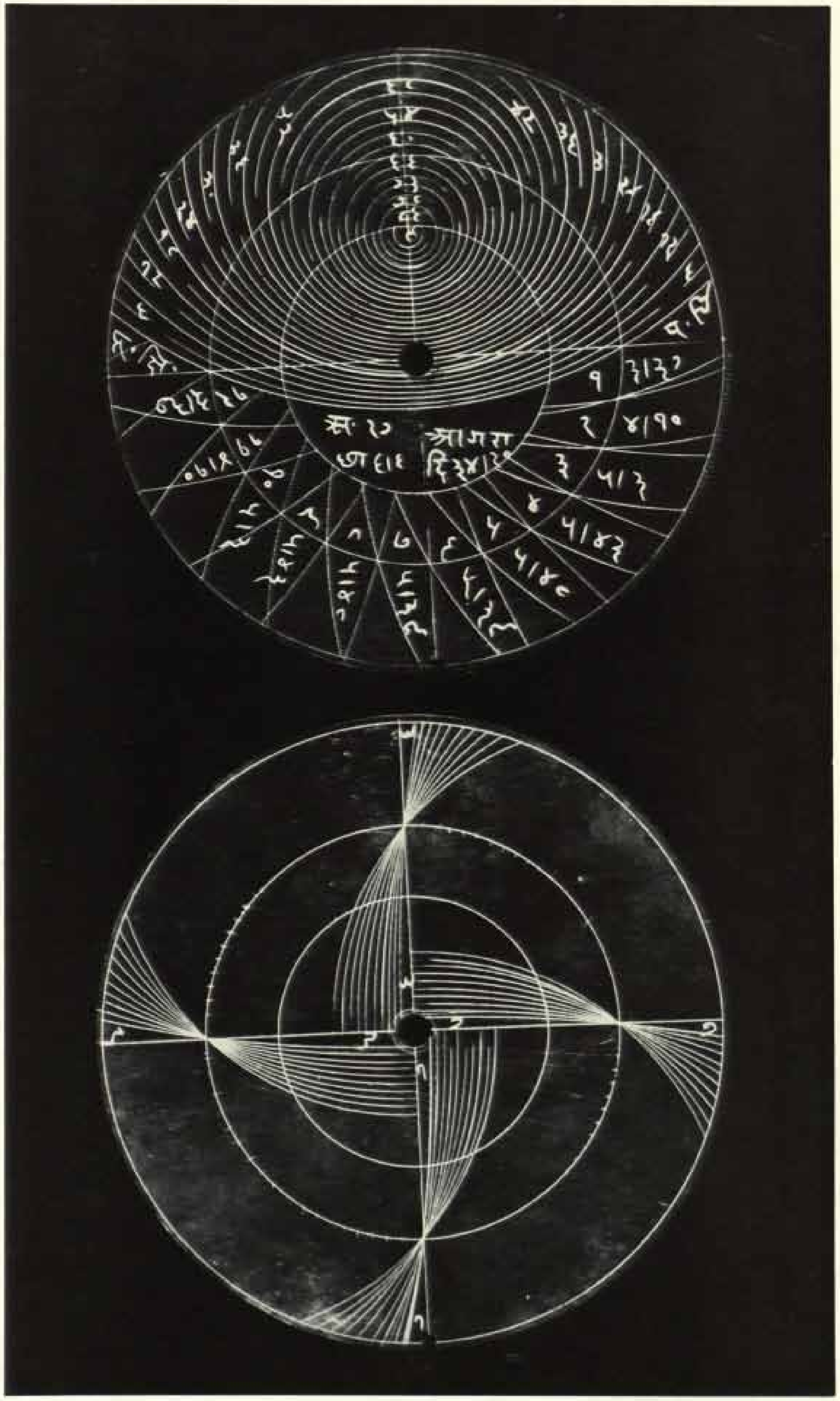
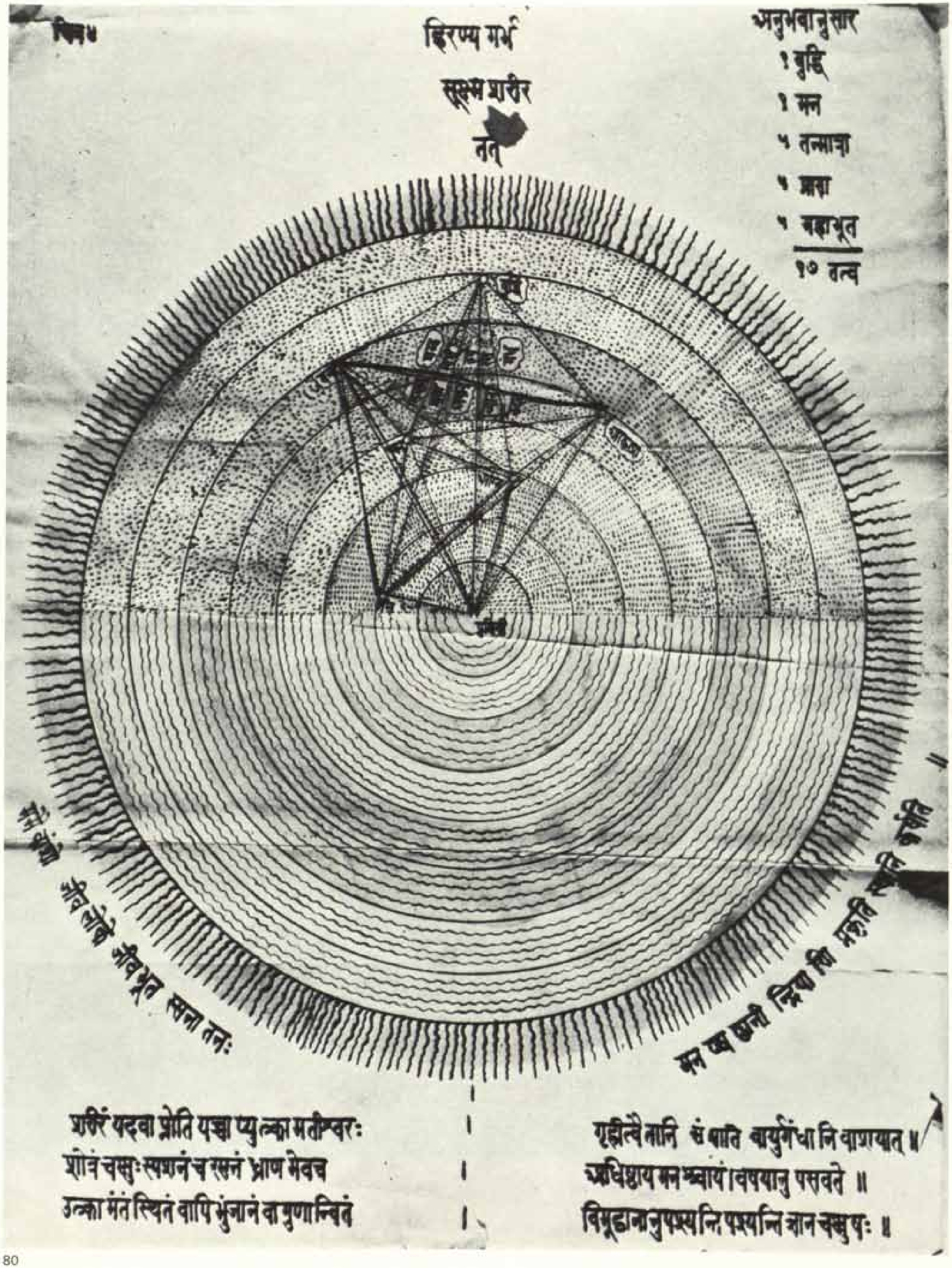
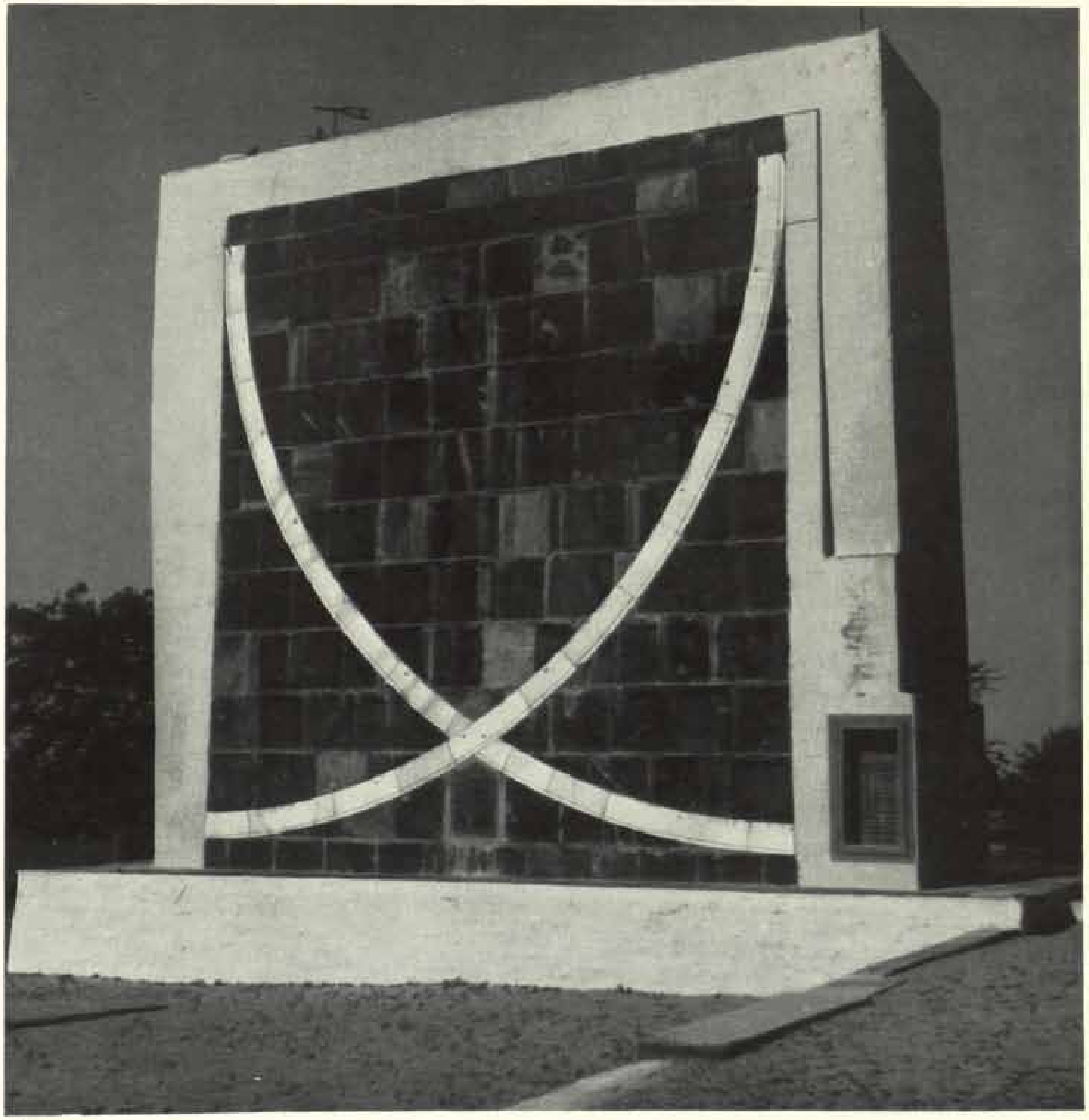


78–79


हिरण्य गर्भ
सूक्ष्म शरीर
तत्
अनुभवानुसार
१ बुद्धि
१ मन
५ तन्मात्रा
५ प्राण
५ महाभूत
१७ तत्व
ममैवांशो जीवलोके जीवभूत सनातनः
मन षष्ठानी न्द्रियाणि प्रकृति स्थानि कर्षति ॥
शरीरं यदवाप्नोति यच्चाप्युत्क्रामतीश्वरः । गृहीत्वैतानि संयाति वायुर्गंधानिवाशयात् ॥
श्रोत्रं चक्षुः स्पर्शनं च रसनं घ्राणमेव च । अधिष्ठाय मनश्चायं विषयानुपसेवते ॥
उत्क्रामंतं स्थितं वापि भुंजानं वा गुणान्वितं । विमूढा नानुपश्यन्ति पश्यन्ति ज्ञानचक्षुषः ॥



81

Description of plates, chapter 8

Plate 72
Savasana. Painting. Basohli school. Jammu-Kashmir. c. 18th century A.D. In the Great Dissolution (*Mahapralaya*), all creatures, even the greatest among them, are reduced to mere corpses; hence *Mahapralaya* is symbolized by the cremation ground. Kali, or Bhairavi (the Black, the Terrible One), is *cit-sakti*, pervading the whole universe as pure consciousness. By her *maya* she is manifesting herself, renewing the cycles of inception and annihilation through never-ending aeons of time. She is the changeless, unlimited, primordial power acting in the great drama, awakening the pent-up force of Siva, while Mahakala lies inert, a passive onlooker, destined to be destroyed in the great dissolution. Private collection.

Plate 73
Garbhaputa or cavity of the womb (detail of a Bhuvana-pata). Scroll painting. Rajasthan. c. 18th century A.D. In that the individual being and the universal being (*vyashti-samashti*) are one, all that exists in the cosmos must also reside within the individual body. In this scroll, Kundalini sakti, the creative force of the universe within the individual is shown in the form of a snake awakened from her dormant state (*yoganidra*), and ascending to merge with Brahman, the Supreme Being, whose manifested energy She is. From the dark descending levels to the ascending light ones, the individual soul, *atman*, is a spark of the Supreme Being; by transmigration it passes from state to state until it atteins release through the loss of individual identity with the Universal One. Private collection.

Plate 74
Mahamai (the Great Mother). Wood. South India. c. 18th century A.D. The whole universe is pregnant and constantly churning up new constellations of form. The child bursts from the womb—a tremendous potential power is trying to manifest itself as man or woman. When man realizes that he extends far beyond the limits of his individual space-time, he may awake to his true nature, which is pure in itself and without duality. After having been born 8,400,000 times, the *jiva* is said to attain birth as man. He then is born 200,000 times in the inferior species of humanity, gradually attaining better and better births, until he is liberated from all the bonds of matter. Private collection.

Plate 75
Purushakara Yantra. Painting on cloth. Rajasthan. c. 18th century A.D. Private collection.

Plate 76
Purushakara Yantra. Painting. Rajasthan. c. 18th century A.D. The seven ascending planes of experience, called *lokas*, are then seen (*lokayanta*), or the experienced; and the seven descending planes are known as *talas*. The centre of these planes is the "earth-plane" (*bhurloka*) shown as a circle. The planes are not like geological strata: the ascending planes are supernormal states and the descending planes are subnormal experiences, while the earth-plane is the normal experience. The complete drama of the universe is repeated here, with one inevitable end—dissolution. Private collection.

Plate 77
Jai Prakas Yantra. Stone. Jaipur. 1728 A.D. The Jai Prakas also called Sarvayantrasiromani (crest jewel of all yantras), is one of the finest astronomical instruments. Shaped as a hemisphere, it holds on its concave side cross wires to serve as coordinates from north to south and east to west. The sun's position can be calculated by the shadow of the intersecting wires, as it falls on the global surface. Other heavenly bodies can also be observed directly; for such direct observation, the graduated points are needed; passages extend into the hemisphere, and the instrument itself is duplicated. Photograph: S. L. Vohra.

Plates 78–79
Astrolabes. Brass. Jaipur. 18th century A.D. The two thin discs or tablets, part of the astrolabe principally used by Jai Singh, are engraved with azimuth circles, hour circles, etc., for various latitudes, etc. Private collection.

Plate 80
Cosmic Plan. Painting. Jaipur. Early 19th century A.D. Energy circles around the earth in the centre with lines to indicate the tensions of various elements acting upon the earth. Private collection.

Plate 81
Dakshina Vritti Yantra. Engraving in lime plaster. Ujjain. Early 18th century A.D. A wall lies along the meridian; on its east face is a double quadrant, the centres of which appear 25 feet apart at points near the top corners of the wall. Photograph: Archaeological Survey of India.

82

9

"Neither the lotus seat nor fixing the gaze on the tip of the nose are Yoga. It is the identity of Jivatma and Paramatma, which is Yoga."

Kularnava Tantra

83

84

85

86

Description of plates, chapter 9

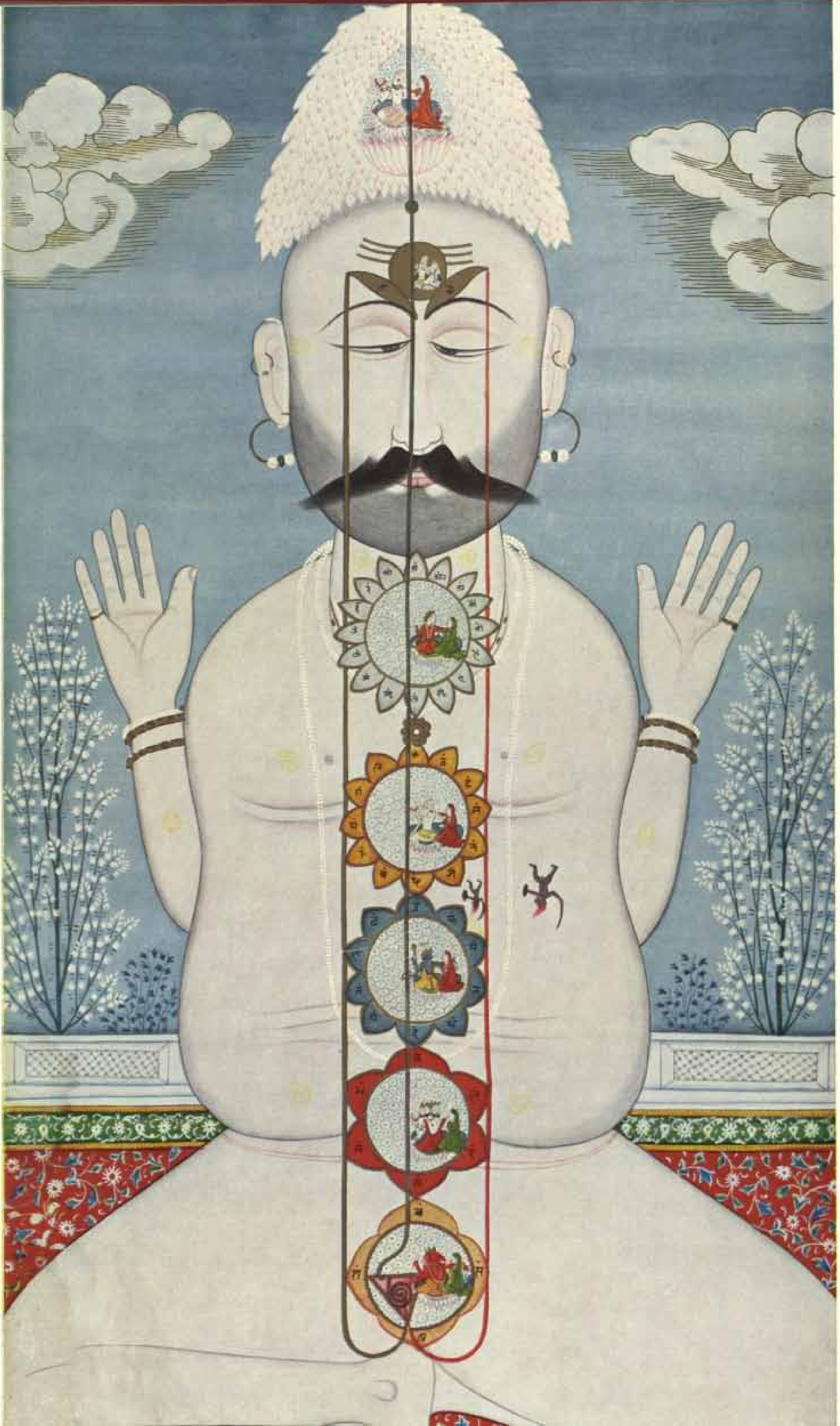
Plate 82
Hastakara Yantra. Painting. Western India. c. 18th century A.D. Tantras are not only concerned with astronomy, but also with astrology, palmistry, chemistry, medicine, etc. The science of the knowledge of interplanetary rhythms and their integral relation with the human organism is known as *jyotisha*. This word, which derives from the Sanskrit root, *jyut*, meaning to shine, cannot be adequately translated as its meanings are complex and at many levels. Private collection.

Plate 83
Yogini. Stone. Madura. c. 17th century A.D. The path of yoga is as "sharp as the razor's edge, hard to cross, difficult to tread" and generally requires a long process of preparation. The science of yoga has been developed in India throughout the ages with practical steps as useful aids for reaching the goal. Photograph: Archaeological Survey of India.

Plate 84
Yogin. Stone. Khajuraho. Visvanatha temple. 1059–1087 A.D. Meditation means perfect concentration of mind. An appropriate *asana* therefore produces, not only physical, but also mental equilibrium. Photograph: Archaeological Survey of India.

Plate 85
Yonisthan, detail of a scroll showing the *satcakras*. Scroll painting. Nepal. c. 17th century A.D. Conceived as a microcosm, the human body parallels everything found in the macrocosm. The idea is to search for the whole truth within one's self. If god is to be found in the universe, we may look for him within ourselves. The *satcakras* or six *cakras* are all located in the *linga-sharira*, the subtle body, not in the *sthula-sharira*, the gross body. Nerve centres, called *cakras*, hold an important place in Hatha yoga practice. The yogin, who with the knowledge of the six *cakras* has been able to unite the dormant Sakti with Siva, the process known as raising the Kundalini Sakti is called a Kaula. Kundalini Sakti is located in the *Muladhara-cakra*. Private collection.

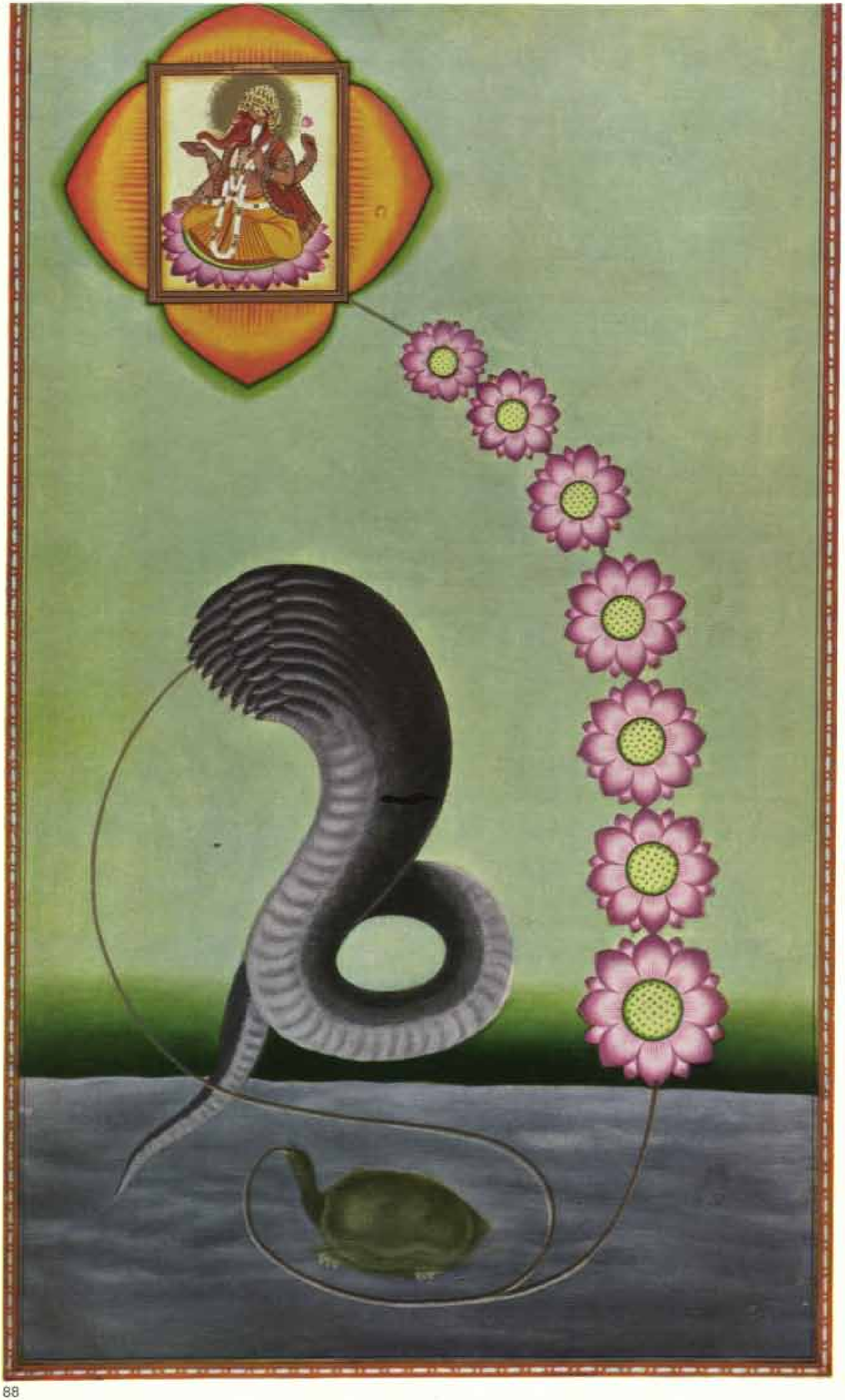
Plate 86
Sahasrara, detail of a scroll showing the *satcakras*. Scroll painting. Nepal. c. 17th century A.D. A thousand-petalled lotus (*sahasrara padma*) of all colours hangs with its head downward from the *Brahmarandhra*, the region of the first cause (*Brahmaloka*); it is also the cause of the six preceding centres or *cakras*. When the Kundalini is struck, it awakens, uncoils itself, and begins to rise upwards like a fiery serpent breaking upon each lotus as it ascends, until the Sakti merges with the Purusha in the *Brahmarandhra* in a deep *samadhi* or union. Private collection.



87

O

Svadharanarupa:
"I am the universal form."

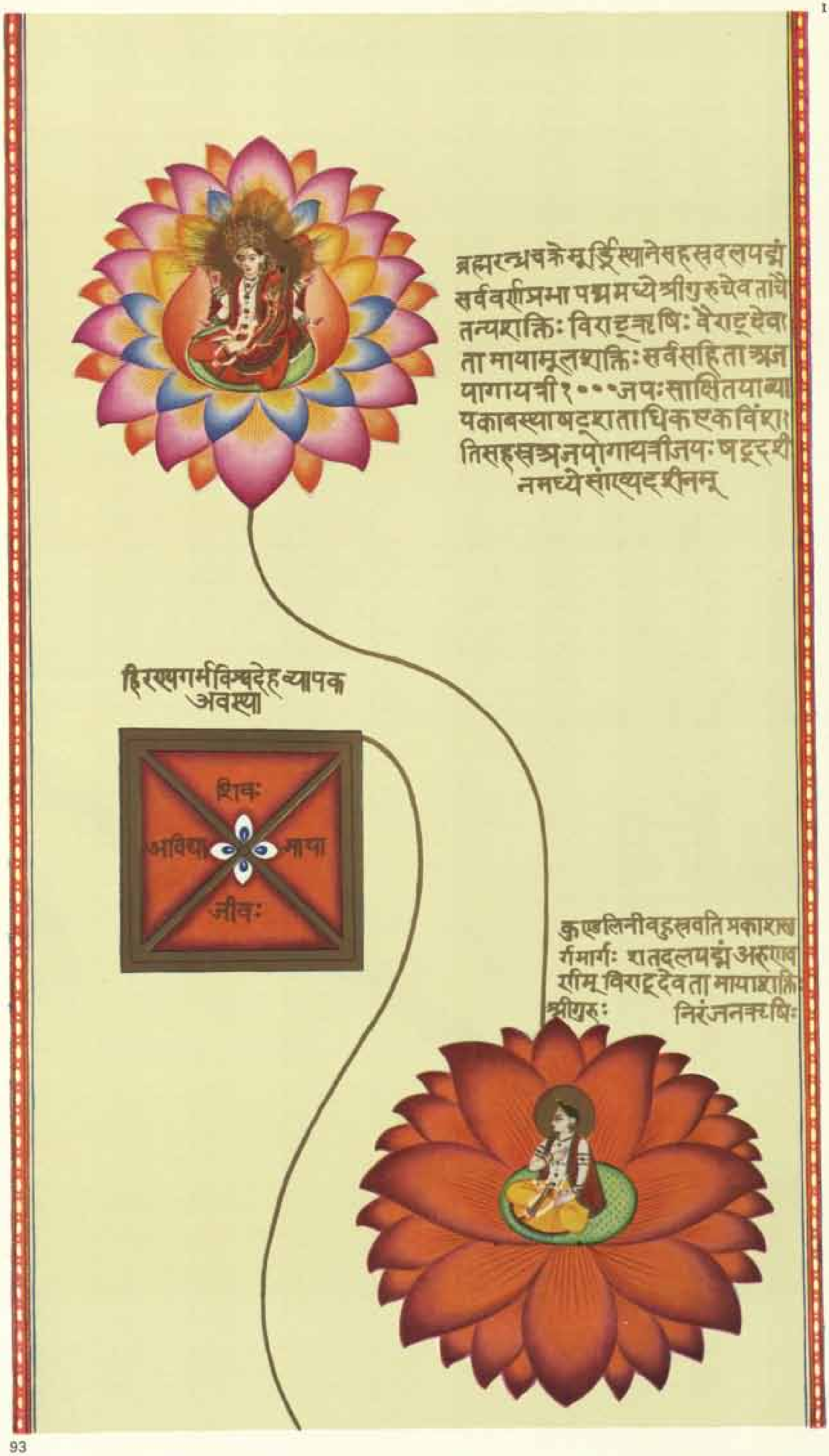


88

89

91

ललाटस्थाअमृतचक्रंकामधेनुगाय
त्रीसोत्पत्तिः चत्वारिस्थानानि अम्बि
का१ लम्बिका घंटिका ३ तालिका४
कामधेनुअमृतंश्रवतेकाकमुखी
अहंकारमस्तकम् ब्रह्मपरं मुखक
लं मनुष्यवत् गोश्रृङ्गी अश्व
ग्रीवा मयूरपुच्छः हंसपक्षः
चंद्रोपरिअमृतंश्रवति
योगीनांअभ्यासादमृ
तंश्रवतिचंद्रः अजपा
गायत्रीमहामंत्रंयोगिंद्रो
जपतिसर्वदा
ललाटस्थानेचन्द्रचक्रंद्वात्रिंशद्दल
पद्मं श्वेतवर्णं मध्येचन्द्रमादेवता
अमृताशक्तिः सोमऋषिः कला
सहिताकामधेनुगायत्रीदेवता१
अमृतंश्रवति
त्रिवेणीचक्रंभ्रुवोर्ध्वस्थानेत्रिभु
वनमण्डलंगङ्गायमुनासरस्वती
स्थानानि इडापिङ्गलासुषुम्ना१
मार्गं स्वर्गमर्त्यपातालमार्गः त्रि१
कालद्रष्टायोगिन्द्रोभवेत्
भ्रुवोस्थानेआज्ञाचक्रंद्विदलपद्मंमाणिक्य
वर्णं पद्ममध्येपरमात्मादेवताविद्याश१
क्तिः अव्यक्तछन्दः परापरवाचा सामवे
दः अजपागायत्री१०००जपः ज्ञानदे
हः उन्मनीअवस्था


ब्रह्मरन्ध्रचक्रेमूर्द्धिस्थानेसहस्रदलपद्मं
सर्ववर्णप्रभा पद्ममध्येश्रीगुरुश्चैव ताचै
तन्यशक्तिः विराट्ऋषिः वैराट्देवा
ता मायामूलशक्तिः सर्वसहिता अज
पागायत्री १००० जपः साक्षितया व्या
पकावस्था षट्शताधिक एकविंश
तिसहस्रअजपोगायत्रीजपः षट्दर्शी
नमध्ये सांख्यदर्शनम्
हिरण्यगर्भविश्वदेहव्यापक
अवस्था
शिवः
अविद्या
माया
जीवः
कुण्डलिनीवहुस्रवति मकारश्च
र्गमार्गः शतदलपद्मं अरुणव
र्णम् विराट्देवता मायाशक्तिः
श्रीगुरुः निरंजनऋषिः

93

Creation: *Rig Veda*

"Nor aught, nor naught existed then, not the aerial space nor heaven's bright roof. Above, what covered all? Where rested all? Was it water, the profound abyss?

"Death was not then, nor immortality. There was no difference of day and night. That one breathed breathless of life and there was nothing other than it.

"In the beginning there was darkness in darkness unfolded. All was undistinguishable water. That one that lay in the empty space wrapped in nothingness was developed by the powers of heat.

"Desire first arose in it. That was primaeval germ in mind, which poets reaching with their intellect discovered in their hearts to be the bond between Being and not-Being.

"A ray of light which stretched across these, did it come from below or from above? Then seeds were sown and mighty forces arose and nature beneath and power and forces above.

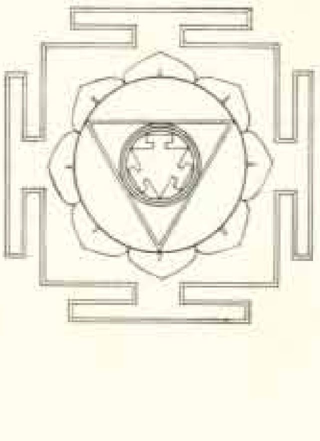
"Who indeed knows? Who proclaimed it here? Whence was the creation produced? The Gods were later than its production. Who knows whence it sprang.

"He from whom this creation sprang whether he made it or not; the all seer in the highest heaven he knows it or does not". (Tr. from Sanskrit by Muir.)

Dissolution: *The Universe and Dr. Einstein*

"Although it is true that the amount of matter in the universe is perpetually changing, the change appears to be all in one direction—toward dissolution. All the phenomena of nature, visible and invisible, within the atom and in outer space, indicate that the substance and energy of the universe are inexorably diffusing like vapour through the insatiable void. The sun is slowly but surely burning out, the stars are dying embers, and everywhere in the cosmos heat is turning to cold, matter is dissolving into radiation, and energy is being dissipated into empty space.

"The universe is thus progressing toward an ultimate 'heat-death', or as it is technically defined, a condition of 'maximum entropy'. When the universe reaches this state some billions of years from now all the processes of nature will cease. All space will be at the same temperature. No energy can be used because all of it will be uniformly distributed through the cosmos. There will be no light, no life, no warmth—nothing but perpetual and irrevocable stagnation. Time itself will come to an end. For entropy points the direction of time. Entropy is the measure of randomness. When all system and order in the universe have vanished, when randomness is at its maximum, and entropy cannot be increased, when there no longer is any sequence of cause and effect—in short, when the universe has run down, there will be no direction to time, there will be no time. And there is no way of avoiding this destiny". (Lincoln Barnett.)



95

Description of plates, chapter O

Plate 87

Yogin with six cakras. Painting. Kangra school. Late 18th century A.D. The nerves conceived as *Ida* and *Pingala* existing on the left and righthand sides of the human body represent the principle of duality. The yogin terminates their separate functions, and through the passage of the central nerve, *Susumna* the Kundalini energy rises, and enables him to attain final realization. These nerves—not the gross physical ones known to medical science—are *yoganadis*, the subtle channels, *vivara*, along which the *pranic* currents flow. If the *nadis* were revealed to the naked eye, the body would appear as a highly complicated chart of oceanic currents. The two forces flow through the human body as psychic energies in two main channels, the lunar *Ida-nadi* and the solar *Pingala-nadi*, and move in opposite directions around *Susumna-nadi*, which, in turn, runs like a hollow channel through the centre of the spinal column, meeting *Ida* and *Pingala* in the perineum at the base of the spine.

The *Susumna* remains closed at its lower end, as long as the latent creative forces of the Kundalini are not awakened. In this state the Kundalini, compared to a coiled serpent, the symbol of latent energy, blocks the entrance to the *Susumna*. By awakening the Kundalini's dormant forces, otherwise absorbed in unconscious and purely bodily functions, and by directing them to the higher centres, the energies thus released are transformed and sublimated until their perfect unfolding and conscious realization are achieved in the highest centre, *Brahmarandhra*, the seat of the *Sahasrara-cakra*. This is the aim and purpose of the Kundalini Yoga.

When the Susumna current opens and begins to rise, the individual no longer uses either his intellect or his senses, for he has become superconscious. These nerve centres which transform and distribute the forces flowing through them are called *cakras*. In other words, these *cakras* are the centres in which psychic forces and bodily functions merge into each other or interpenetrate each other. Within the *cakras*, cosmic and psychic energies crystalize into bodily qualities, which are finally dissolved or transmuted again into psychic forces.

The awakened Kundalini moves upwards; as she reaches a particular *cakra*, symbolically represented as a lotus, that lotus opens out and lifts its flower, while the *saktis* of the *cakras* and all other forces then become assimilated to Kundalini. As soon as she leaves for a higher cakra, the lotus closes and hangs downwards. Thus in her ascent, Kundalini absorbs within herself all the kinetic energy with which the different centres remain charged and finally becomes united with Parama Siva in the *Sahasrarapadma*.

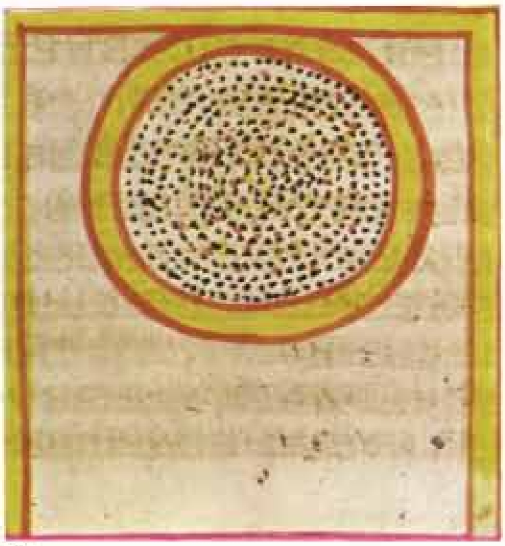
The Kundalini's awakening and passage through the *cakras* arouses an intense heat. As she ascends, the lower part of the body becomes inert and cold. The various *cakras* not only serve as openings into progressively more subtle levels or existence, but also release into action all the forces and energies centred in them. Kunda means coil, and even the earth itself, according to the Tantra-sastras, is not exactly revolving round the sun, but is moving in an eddying, coil-like motion. Such coiling movement may be clockwise or anti-clockwise; the earth in its anti-clockwise motion may be gradually drawn towards the empty space and ultimately merged into it. Private collection.

Plates 88–94

Satcakras and Mula-Prakriti. Painting. Rajasthan. c. 19th century A.D. Primal Sakti is one, but she manifests herself as minor *saktis* in the different *cakras*. Owing to the upward tension effected by the opening of the Muladhara-*bandha* (knot), the Sakti begins to rise. The creation and dissolution of this Sakti is known as the mula, or the root of the universe. Plate 95 signifies Mula-Prakriti as the pure void, for only as such can it contain a pure fullness. But in the act of creation in space and time it becomes a matrix of forms, in which three qualities or tendencies appear. In the void of Mula-Prakriti these qualities are not distinguishable, because they balance each other perfectly. Only in the realm of visible nature is this balance no longer perfectly maintained. Again, at the universal dissolution, all are withdrawn and return to the First Cause, *Avyakta*, the unmanifested One which is Mula-Prakriti. Private collection.

Plate 95

Brahma Yantra. Painting. Rajasthan. 18th century A.D. Private collection. The knowledge of Brahma (pure essence) is symbolized by a yellow square in the centre which is surrounded by different power-fields as sustainer of various regions, representing the degrees of consciousness.



96

Plate 96
Trilokya Chitram. Painting. Jain. Gujrat. 17th century A.D. Private collection. Time (Kala) is the power that limits the existence of eternal elements in matter. Here it is represented as Salake 'spokes', gradually diminishing towards 'timeless' moment in which both the devoid of time state of Nirvana as well as the full revolution of Brahma's time could be resolved. Time is considered in three ranges – the first and the last is cosmic – second is calendar time to measure units of days and months and the last is horological time for measuring the duration of the days and is determined by lesser units – separating day and night by twilight periods by the infinitesimally fractional troti – 'particle' or atom of time. The pala (vipala?) meaning 'fleeting', is the duration of four and a half nimeshas (blink) or about two and a half complete blinks. Every activity and movement had a time relationship and the criterion of the 'motion' of time was believed to differ with the seasons, and every other creation which is said to be the projection of Sound, depending on circumstances.

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Plate 97

Shani Chakra. Painting. Gujrat. 16th century A.D. Private collection. These astronomical paintings are meant to ascertain the sun's altitude, to find the declination of a planet or a star, and to determine celestial latitudes and longitudes.

Contents

11 . . . . Part 1
39 . . . . Part 2
57 . . . . Part 3
71 . . . . Part 4
83 . . . . Part 5
91 . . . . Part 6
103 . . . . Part 7
113 . . . . Part 8
125 . . . . Part 9
133 . . . . Part 0
145 . . . . Select Bibliography

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